

# Colonials, Expatriates, Radicals, Moderns and Postmoderns

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# Colonials, Expatriates, Radicals, Moderns and Postmoderns

Essays in Australian Literature

Michael Wilding

Australian Scholarly

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*To Nick Walker*



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# Adam Lindsay Gordon

In the years since Adam Lindsay Gordon's death in 1870 his reputation as a poet rose to great heights, celebrated as the 'National Poet of Australia' with his bust in Westminster Abbey in 1934, only to decline to neglect and comparative obscurity. His first published book, *The Feud* (1864)<sup>1</sup>, was a poem in the manner of the Scots border ballads. Popularised in the nineteenth century by Sir Walter Scott, the ballads were a major inspiration to Gordon. His verse continued to appear anonymously and pseudonymously for the next five years when, as Marcus Clarke recalled in his 'Preface' to Gordon's poems, 'he discovered one morning that everybody knew a couplet or two of "How We Beat the Favourite"'.<sup>2</sup> Although set in England, its account of a contemporary steeplechase proved immediately popular. 'Within a few days every sporting man in Melbourne knew it by heart,' Sir Frank Madden confirmed: 'We were all horsemen then, and looked upon steeplechasing as the acme of the sport.'<sup>3</sup>

'How We Beat the Favourite' appeared in the *Australasian*, 12 June 1869. Six months later in January 1870 'The Sick Stockrider' appeared in the *Colonial Monthly* under Marcus Clarke's editorship, and was reprinted in the *Australasian*, 15 January. It remains his best-known poem. Gordon wrote to John Riddoch, 17 January: 'Bye the bye did you like those verses of mine, "The Stockrider?" It was written at Yallum where I think you saw the manuscript, in fact, I think it was there. Now I remember this because they made quite a stir here & were copied into *The Australasian* & spoken of with praise – I don't think much of them myself.'<sup>4</sup> The Australian setting, the poignant theme and the note of authenticity gave the poem immense appeal. 'This is genuine ... The writer has ridden his ride as well as written it,' Marcus Clarke wrote.<sup>5</sup>

Later commentators have agreed, Douglas Stewart and Nancy Keesing wrote in their introduction to *The Pacific Book of Bush Ballads* that

Gordon, particularly with 'The Sick Stockrider', did undoubtedly give the greatest single impetus to the ballads of the nineties; and probably ... he established the style of the pounding rhythm and the long line which is generally characteristic of the ballads after him.<sup>6</sup>

W. H. Wilde concluded his study *Adam Lindsay Gordon*:

He was the first of Australia's literary balladists – 'The Sick Stockrider' was clearly the one poem from which the ensuing hosts of bush ballads derived. His poem contained in it the beginning of the story of Australian bush life. The balladists who came after him, crowding the Literary Pages of the 1880s and 1890s, took up and amplified the story ... The lament of the dying stockman, however, will always mark the moment when the literature of this country began to move in a new and more characteristically Australian direction.<sup>7</sup>

19 February 1870 the *Australasian* published Gordon's 'From the Wreck', a vigorous, horse-riding narrative, 'instantly recalling Browning's vivid "How They Brought the Good News to Ghent," but rendered by reason of its local colouring independent of the latter' as Henry Kendall remarked.<sup>8</sup> This was followed 7 May by 'Wolf and Hound. Our Sergeant's Yarn' dealing with the hunting down of a bushranger. The Australian bush ballad was firmly established. Kendall remarked

they seem to have been suggested by the robust, sporting lyrics of Whyte-Melville, Lawrence, and Kingsley. Still we are bound to say we believe that, in naked strength, in dash, and in all the requisites that go towards making a perfect song of the sort, Gordon's productions are far and away beyond his models.<sup>9</sup>

Gordon wrote within the dominant nineteenth-century tradition with its themes from the Classics ('Podas Okus', 'Pastor Cum'), The Bible ('Delilah') and medievalism ('The Romance of Britomarte', 'The Rhyme of the Joyous Garde'). The archaisms and poeticisms were all part of contemporary poetic practice. Tennyson was a significant contemporary influence. Clarke cites others. 'The classic student will find much to repay him in the many Browning-Landor poems which bear the poet's name,' he wrote in his 'Country Leisure' piece, and in the 'Preface', 'The influence of Browning and of Swinburne upon the writer's taste is plain.'<sup>10</sup>

But at the same time Gordon had been providing rhyming racing tips for *Bell's Sporting Life in Australia*. The emphasis here is on the immediate, on contemporary, colloquial idiom, and on a fluent, informal manner, capturing the conversational and spontaneous. He writes in 'Hippodromania':

DEAR BELL, – I enclose what you ask in a letter  
A short rhyme at random, no more and no less,  
And you may insert it for want of a better,  
Or leave it, it doesn't matter much, I guess ...  
My wandering thoughts no longer stray

I'll fix my overcoat buttons;  
Secure my old hat as best I may  
(And a shocking bad one it is, by the way).<sup>11</sup>

Gordon opened up the possibilities of contemporary idiom for later poets. And it is all done with an engaging self-deprecation, the upper-class diffidence of a Byronic bushman married to the new world's scorn of pretentiousness:

All loosely he's striding, the amateur's riding,  
All loosely, some reverie lock'd in  
Of a 'vision in smoke', or a 'wayfaring bloke',  
His poetical rubbish concocting.<sup>12</sup>

He could write with an effortless naturalness. 'A Basket of Flowers' has a delicate, light note, capturing a beautiful spontaneity of improvisation. Gordon had been staying with John Riddoch at Yallum and Riddoch's daughter, Lizzie, asked him to write a poem to go with a basket of flowers which was to be sent to her aunt, Mary Lord, for St Valentine's Day. He wrote it on horseback while returning to Melbourne.

Fresh flowers in a basket –  
An offering to you –  
Though you did not ask it,  
Unbidden I strew ...

The garlands I gather,  
The rhymes I string fast,  
Are hurriedly rather  
Than heedlessly cast ...

Songs empty, yet airy,  
I've striven to write,  
For failure, dear Mary!  
Forgive me – Goodnight!<sup>13</sup>

In his elegy 'The Late Mr A. L. Gordon: In Memoriam', in the *Australasian*, 2 July 1870, Kendall noted 'the mournful meaning of the undersong / Which runs through all he wrote.'<sup>14</sup> The nineteenth-century crisis of religious faith permeates Gordon's verse and informs some of his most memorable work with a haunting note, from 'De Te' and 'Doubtful Dreams' to 'A Song of Autumn'. 'A Song of Autumn' was written when Gordon was staying at Toorak with John Power, and Power's five-year-old daughter Maud asked Gordon to pick a bunch of flowers.

'Where shall we go for our garlands glad  
 At the falling of the year,  
 When the burnt-up banks are yellow and sad,  
 When the boughs are yellow and sere?  
 Where are the old ones that once we had,  
 And when are the new ones near?  
 What shall we do for our garlands glad  
 At the falling of the year?'

*You* may gather again, my dear –  
 But *I* go where the last year's lost leaves go  
 At the falling of the year.<sup>15</sup>

Edward Elgar, Percy Grainger and Miriam Hyde all set 'A Song of Autumn' to music and Elgar set another of Gordon's poems, 'The Swimmer', to music as one of his 'Sea Pictures':

I would that with sleepy, soft embraces  
 The sea would fold me – would find me rest  
 In luminous shades of her secret places,  
 In depths where her marvels are manifest;  
 So the earth beneath her should not discover  
 My hidden couch – nor the heaven above her –  
 As a strong love shielding a weary lover,  
 I would have her shield me with shining breast.<sup>16</sup>

Like 'The Sick Stockrider', it combines the exhilaration of vigorous activity and participation in the world of natural forces with that pervasive sense of mortality recurrent in his poetry. Kendall in his review preferred 'his poems founded on the passion of love. The intensity of feeling contained in two or three of these, we venture to say, is as deeply marked as that in Browning's most passionate lyrics.' He singled out 'No Name' and 'Laudamus'.

The Australian bush and ocean, experienced and carefully observed, are the context for the action of Gordon's poetry rather than the subject itself.

through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd;  
 And the golden-tinted fern leaves, how they rustled underneath  
 And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd!

Kendall wrote: 'he paints Nature with the firm and free hand of a master. Here we have no prolix work, no after touches, no niggling over petty details, but vivid

pictures, always tersely expressed, and sometimes conveyed by means of a single epithet.<sup>17</sup>

The 'Dedication' to *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* offers some sustained evocation:

In the Spring, when the wattle gold trembles  
    'Twixt shadow and shine  
When each dew-laden air draught resembles  
    A long draught of wine ...

The wattle blossom is recurrent in his verse, and wattle was planted at his grave, recalling the concluding lines of 'The Sick Stockrider':

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,  
    With never stone or rail to fence my bed;  
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,  
    I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

In his 'In Memoriam' poem on Gordon, Kendall wrote that he 'sang the first great songs these lands can claim / To be their own.'<sup>18</sup> Clarke in his 'Preface' wrote, 'The student of these unpretending volumes will be repaid for his labour. He will find in them something very like the beginnings of a national school of Australian poetry.'<sup>19</sup> Australian readers responded. Ronald G. Campbell records in *The First Ninety Years: The Printing House of Massina*, 'Gordon's *Poems* was another bestseller, 20,000 volumes being disposed of between 1880 and the end of the decade.'<sup>20</sup> The poems were widely read and remembered and quoted. And not only by the 'horsemen' and 'every sporting man' of Sir Frank Madden's recollections. Miles Franklin refers to him as one of 'my sworn friends and companions' in *My Brilliant Career*: 'Gordon, with his sad, sad humanism and bitter disappointment, held out his hand and took me with him.' And she quotes from his 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer, Fytte VI, Potter's Clay' and 'Wormwood and Nightshade' in chapter 7 and 'Wormwood and Nightshade' again and 'Podas Okus' in chapter 38.<sup>21</sup> Humphris and Sladen list some thirty 'famous sayings of Gordon' that had passed into popular currency, and his famous quatrain from 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer' remains in circulation today:

Life is mostly froth and bubble,  
    Two things stand like stone,  
KINDNESS in another's trouble,  
    COURAGE in your own.<sup>22</sup>

Leonie Kramer has charted 'The Literary Reputation of Adam Lindsay Gordon.'<sup>23</sup> Inevitably there was a reaction. John K. Ewers declared in *Creative Writing in Australia* (1945): 'his poetry, although it impressed his contemporaries, has little to say to the present generation.'<sup>24</sup> Gordon was excluded from *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (1958) and Les Murray's *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1986).<sup>25</sup> Harry Heseltine remarked somewhat grudgingly in the 1972 *Penguin Book of Australian Verse* 'Whatever its shortcomings, "The Sick Stockrider" must find its way into a representative anthology of Australian verse, as much for its one time prestige as for its prototypical failures.'<sup>26</sup> G. A. Wilkes featured him in his anthology *The Colonial Poets* (1974), but that was the last major representation of his work. In 2011 Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann included three examples of his work in *Australian Poetry since 1788*, remarking 'His reputation faded during the twentieth century. He is sometimes left out of anthologies and is now seriously underrated.'<sup>27</sup>

*Quadrant*, 64, 9, September 2020.



# Adam Lindsay Gordon in England: The Legend of the Steeplechase

The life of Adam Lindsay Gordon has been written several times. The hard-riding poet was a figure who captured the popular imagination, and his career has been recounted with all the embroidery and colouring of a legend. Yet for most of the events of his life there is little evidence, and the few facts that are known remain still confused with the myth. John Manifold in his *Who Wrote the Ballads?*<sup>1</sup> writes without question that Gordon was educated at Oxford University. It is an old story, but quite without foundation, as are the claims that he went to Glasgow and Cambridge universities. He went to no university. And though neither Macartney's revision of Morris Miller's *Australian Literature*<sup>2</sup> nor the bibliography in the Pelican *Literature of Australia*<sup>3</sup> claim a university, the accounts they do give of Gordon's education are misleadingly incomplete. The three schools he attended were Cheltenham College, the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and the Royal Grammar School, Worcester. Even the regularly repeated date and place of his birth have been incorrect. He was born not in the Azores, but at Charlton Kings near Cheltenham on 19 October 1833.<sup>4</sup>

A story that has not been doubted, however, is that of Gordon's last steeplechase in England, to enter which he stole a horse, and as a result of which his family sent him to Australia. The story has not been doubted – but very few accounts of the episode agree on the facts. As the accounts are traced chronologically through books and articles recording Gordon's life, the horse changes names, the steeplechase is set in either contradictory or unspecified places, and sometimes Gordon rides the horse, both to win and to lose, and sometimes does not.

The earliest version I have found is in an article by Alexander Sutherland, a native of Glasgow who came to Sydney in 1866 when he was fourteen, graduated in Arts at the University of Melbourne, and who at the end of his life was Acting Professor of English Literature at Melbourne. Sutherland gives no account of the source of his material, but as he would have been only eighteen at the time of Gordon's suicide, it is unlikely that he would have had any personal acquaintance with the poet.

Sutherland claims that Gordon was removed from Woolwich Military Academy owing to ‘some scrape’, and then went to Merton College, Oxford (untrue). But he never gained a degree since

an exposure occurred which compelled him to leave the country. There was a certain livery stable keeper named Oliver, the ‘black Tom Oliver’ referred to in the poem ‘By Flood and Field’, who became a great friend of these gay but reckless youths of the Cotswold. Gordon and another wished to buy from him a racehorse named ‘Tom Whiffler’ for which they saved up their cash and paid frequent instalments. They considered they had paid enough to have acquired a proprietary right in the animal, and Gordon wished to ride it at a certain race-meeting. Oliver refused to let him have it, and the two youths broke into the stable at midnight, took out the horse, and appeared next morning at the races. Gordon rode and won a steeplechase, and he was in the midst of the universal applause which his bold riding had called forth when Oliver appeared with a warrant for his arrest. By the connivance of his companions he escaped, and remained in strict seclusion until his father interfered and settled the affair. This was in the year 1853, when all Europe was ringing with the excitement connected with Australia ...<sup>5</sup>

In April 1884, the Rev. Julian Tenison Woods wrote his ‘Personal Reminiscence of Adam Lindsay Gordon’ in the *Melbourne Review*.<sup>6</sup> Woods had met Gordon in 1857 and ‘for five years ... was his only intimate friend’. Gordon told him that ‘he had been at a public school or at one of the universities, I forget now which. He said he had been expelled for breaking rules, and absenting himself in order to ride a steeplechase’. But there is no more detail. Then, in *Once a Month*, 15 April 1885, Alexander Sutherland repeats his story of the steeplechase, changing it only by having the police, and not Tom Oliver, arriving with an arrest warrant.<sup>7</sup>

The first full-length biography of Gordon, *The Laureate of the Centaurs*, was published in London in 1888.<sup>8</sup> Its author, John Howlett-Ross, did not know Gordon – he was thirteen when the poet died – but gained information from ‘old newspapers and from personal friends of the poet’. Howlett-Ross agrees with Sutherland in having Gordon educated at Cheltenham College and Merton College, Oxford, but does not mention Woolwich; nor is he specific about where Gordon was when the steeplechase occurred. He says Gordon was then about seventeen – Sutherland said nineteen – but he gives new information on the place of the steeplechase. The details of the event, though, are very different:

Gordon, when a youth about seventeen, was anxious to distinguish himself at the Worcestershire steeplechases, but he was so well known, even then, as a reckless rider, that he found it impossible to obtain a mount. In despair he paid a man named Walker £5 for the privilege of riding his mare next day at the races. The same night it was seized by the sheriff for a debt owed by Walker and locked up in the stables of a Worcester hotel. Gordon failed to see the justice of this, and deeming that he had a certain claim on the animal, broke into the stable and took it away. He appeared at the races on the following day, and, it is asserted, won the steeplechase in which he rode. But at the conclusion of the race the officers of the law appeared, and rescued the horse from its proud rider. He escaped in the crowd, but a warrant was issued for his arrest. The friendly intervention of Tom Oliver, of Prestbury, and the payment of a monetary consideration by Captain Gordon prevented the execution of the warrant. (20)

Howlett-Ross says that this “his most notorious escapade” has often been told, but the correct version of the story (as near as it can possibly be ascertained) may be worthy of repetition.’ Here Oliver is a friend, and there is no mention of part payments or part ownership of the horse by Gordon.

In 1898 Henry Gyles Turner and Alexander Sutherland published *The Development of Australian Literature*. The seven chapters on Gordon were by Sutherland, and the steeplechase episode is here different from his earlier account. The horse is no longer named, but the place it was taken from is specified as Worcester. Olliver (*sic*) is not now the owner but the trainer of the horse which is still being bought on part payments, contrary to Howlett-Ross’s version of the story. Gordon, not allowed to race,

got the horse surreptitiously out of the stable, and appeared with it in the line that fronted the starter’s flag. It is said, but I can find no record of it, that Gordon here won his first victory in steeplechasing. His triumph was of short duration, for he learnt that a warrant was out for his arrest, and that a sheriff was anxiously inquiring after him up and down the course.<sup>9</sup>

This story is much less dramatic. There is no arrest warrant, no universal applause – though the father has ‘to pay a considerable sum to keep the young scapegrace from appearing in court’. It still resulted in Gordon’s departure to Australia. But for the first time, there is some doubt whether Gordon did win the race: though Sutherland does not say from where he got his doubts or his information.

A. Patchett Martin in ‘The beginnings of an Australian Literature’<sup>10</sup> deals with

Gordon, but except for mentioning Cheltenham College as his school, does not refer to the poet's youth, and in his earlier article on Gordon in *Temple Bar* there was no biography at all.<sup>11</sup> Nor does Edith Humphris in her article on Gordon in the *Lone Hand* deal with the horse-stealing episode.<sup>12</sup> However, the story persisted and in the *Melbourne Record* of 25 June, 1910, Mrs Elizabeth Lauder repeats it in her personal reminiscence of Gordon, whom she had known as a young girl, Annie Bright.<sup>13</sup> It is reprinted in Edith Humphris and Douglas Sladen's *Adam Lindsay Gordon* (1912):

It is not generally known why Gordon left Cotswold, England, to live in Australia, but the following is absolutely true, being told by himself to the Bright family. He was attending a military college, and often took part in amateur race meetings. On one occasion he was first favourite and his colleagues (or many of them) were backing his mount; but as the day drew nigh the horse's owner gave orders that the animal was not to be taken out of the stable. Young Gordon was disappointed and rather sore for his friends' sake, and listening to unwise counsel, went to the stable, took the horse, rode and won the race, only to find the owner and a policeman watching for him as he dismounted, after passing the winning post. It was with some difficulty his father kept him from the clutches of the law, but it ended in Gordon being sent out to South Australia.<sup>14</sup>

That non-existent place Cotswold, England (the Cotswolds are a district, not a town or village) may make us doubt the accuracy of the information. And the account appears forty years after Gordon's death. Mrs Lauder had known Gordon, however.

Frank Maldon Robb's introduction to the edition of Gordon's poems published in 1912 by the Oxford University Press mentions only two schools – Cheltenham and Woolwich – for Gordon's education. Robb does, however, repeat Woods's comment that Gordon was expelled from another unspecified school for being absent to ride a steeplechase. Robb does not mention Merton College or the horse-stealing in his introduction. However, he has a note on 'Black Tom Oliver' who is mentioned in Gordon's poem 'By Flood and Field'. Olliver (*sic* in note), Robb writes,

gave Gordon many hints about riding, and lent him horses, and he also got him out of a bad scrape at Worcester when he broke open a stable, and got out the horse he was to ride in the Worcester steeplechase, which had been seized by the Sheriff for a debt of its owner's. A warrant had even been issued for Gordon's arrest when Black Tom came to the rescue.<sup>15</sup>

The account seems based on Howlett-Ross. The horse is anonymous, but a note on Gordon's poem 'Hippodromania' suggests a possible origin for Sutherland's name for the horse. In August 1865, a South Australian horse, 'Tim Whiffler' was entered for the Melbourne Cup. Gordon 'took an immense interest in his performances' and wrote a rhyming tip for the horse's victory in *Bell's Life in Victoria*. It came fourth.

Some new material appeared in 1912 in *Adam Lindsay Gordon and his Friends in England and Australia* by Edith Humphris and Douglas Sladen. Howlett-Ross had recorded that Gordon was expelled from Cheltenham College, though had only implied that the horse-stealing was related to this – but Sladen states emphatically that he was not expelled. He claims also that the horse-stealing could not have occurred at Woolwich, as it took place in 1852, and he had left Woolwich in 1851 (10–11). And the claim of Sutherland that Gordon was at Merton is also reported (25) to have no documentary foundation in the College records.

But there is also some positive material in the Humphris and Sladen book. Here, for the first time, it is said that Gordon was also educated at the Royal Grammar School, Worcester. The evidence, though, is not very definite. Gordon was supposedly at the school when Canon Temple was headmaster and Sladen says Temple left it on record that Gordon was a genius. But where this record is, is not said. Sladen quotes a letter from the headmaster of the Worcester Royal Grammar School in 1912, who evasively claims Gordon was there, but gives no evidence or reference to any written record, and in a later letter says there is no evidence of Gordon's expulsion. Another correspondent of Sladen's, 'Wigorn', quoted some words of Canon Temple's about Gordon, which appeared in a school magazine whose date is not given. Sladen reports more information from 'Wigorn' about the horse-stealing episode, which is here firmly placed in Worcester:

He thinks Gordon did take off the lock of the stable door probably at the old Plough Inn (now the Angel) where Lallah Rookh was kept in a loose box through the archway on the left of the picture. Gordon, however, had to disappear at once. The Sheriff's officers took the mare from him and only Black Tom's persuasive tongue and Captain Gordon's 'monetary consideration' of £30 prevented the execution of the warrant. (211)

In this version, then, Gordon was caught at the stables and did not ride the horse in the race. Here the inn where the horse was kept is named for the first time, and indeed a photograph is given. Sladen however has his information confused –

the inn was originally called the Angel, and later changed to The Plough. And as The Plough it still exists, but bearing no reminder of the association with Gordon, despite the efforts of some Gordon enthusiasts to persuade the brewery that owns it to erect a plaque.

It is in Sladen's account for the first time that the horse is called Lallah Rookh. There is no mention of Tom Whiffler, as the horse was named in Sutherland's account. But even Lallah Rookh seems not to have been a permanent name, for, in the only references Sladen quotes from the *Steeplechase Calendar* for 1852, the horse is called Louisa. Indeed, there is no evidence that Louisa ever was Lallah Rookh, or that Gordon rode the horse or horses under any of its names. Sladen presents his documentation for the episode (213), quoting from the *Steeplechase Calendar*:

May 11, at *Worcestershire Hunt Meeting*, *Crowle* won a 4 miles steeplechase. Entered and ridden by Mr Walker. 5 ran. (This was the time Gordon stole her out of the stable.)

In all Sladen's other quotations from the *Calendar* the horse bears the name Louisa. Somehow no name at all has been included in this crucial instance. There is another mystery too; if Gordon was caught at the stable and the mare seized, why was it ridden by Mr Walker (presumably Gordon's Worcestershire friend Charley Walker) the next day? Why was it not still impounded? When A. G. Stephens wrote his introduction to the 1918 selection of Gordon's poems<sup>16</sup> he disregarded the account in Sladen that Gordon was caught at the stable and did not ride. He mentions that Gordon was educated at Worcester – using Sladen's discoveries that far – but for the horse-stealing episode retains the more colourful account – with Gordon attacking the ostler, stealing the horse, riding her to victory and encountering the horse's owner and the police at the winning post.

*The Adam Lindsay Gordon Memorial Volume* edited by E. A. Vidler gives two different versions of the story, but both involve a successful theft.<sup>17</sup> The first is that Gordon and Walker were buying the horse but not having completed payments, had to steal it to race it; the second is from Harry Stockdale, nephew of Edward Stockdale of Lake Hawden for whom Gordon worked for some time. Stockdale recalled:

His own story, as told to me, was that he and Tom Olliver [*sic*] had shares or were halves in a horse he was going to ride in a steeplechase. The horse was

seized by a bailiff for a debt of Olliver's, and Gordon, in his headstrong way, took possession of it by force.

It is not clear in Stockdale's account whether Gordon actually rode the horse in the race.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Sladen, it is the colourful version that usually persists – or versions, whether Sutherland's, Howlett-Ross's or Mrs Lauder's. An account in the *Brisbane Courier* (26 November 1921) specifies the Worcestershire steeplechase, says the horse had been seized for debt, and that Gordon stole it and rode it to victory. Eileen Kaye's serialised life of Gordon in the *Australasian* has, September, 1935, the incomplete payments story, the breaking open of the stable door, the knocked-down ostler, the victory, and a sheriff's officer at the winning post.<sup>19</sup> In the novelised life of Gordon, *Boy on a Horse* by H. J. Samuel and Enid Moodie Heddle, there is again theft and winning-post exposure – but here Gordon does not win the race, and the owner, and not the police, is waiting at the winning post.<sup>20</sup>

Sladen established quite reasonably that the episode occurred at Worcester – though what the episode exactly was, it not clear. However, his co-author of 1912, Edith Humphris, published her own *Life of Adam Lindsay Gordon* in 1933 in which she mentions the story very briefly.

There is a tale told in Woolwich, as in Worcester, and repeated by General Strange, of Gordon's having stolen a steed out of the stable in order to ride it in a race, which he is said to have won, and then to have been summoned. But it seems hardly likely that the same thing happened in two different places, though of course it is not impossible.<sup>21</sup>

She makes no attempt to adjudicate on the possibilities; and it is not clear by 'summoned' whether she means that Gordon appeared before the magistrates – a version not given elsewhere. And Brian Elliott writing on Gordon in the *Pelican Literature of Australia* again implies that the episode occurred at Woolwich.<sup>22</sup>

In 1934 Sladen published the Westminster Abbey Memorial Volume, *Adam Lindsay Gordon: The Life and Best Poems of the Poet of Australia*.<sup>23</sup> Sladen had not been inactive since 1912; in 1918 he had published a novel, *Fair Inez*, 'a romance of the Lindsay Gordons in Australia', set in the year 2000 A.D.,<sup>24</sup> and he was largely responsible for the campaign resulting in the erection of the memorial plaque to Gordon in Westminster Abbey in 1934. The 1934 volume repeats most of the

1912 material, and nothing new is given about Worcester. Wigorn's material about Gordon's education and stay at Worcester is repeated, though his version of the Lallah Rookh business is now omitted, perhaps because it was not colourful enough, and Mrs Lauder's retained.

Worcester is not often given as a place of education for Gordon. Cheltenham, Woolwich, a small school at Dumbleton, and the doubtful Merton College are repeated, but neither H. M. Green's *History of Australian Literature*, Macartney's bibliography, the Pelican *Literature of Australia*, nor the *Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* mentions Worcester in the biographical notes on Gordon.<sup>25</sup> The school itself, however, has a plaque commemorating his attendance there, even if the only documentary evidence it can produce refers to the admission of his cousin. And the story of the horse race persists – an account by A. J. Woodley in the *Worcestershire Countryside* (April–June 1950) has the horse seized for debt, a bailiff and ostler overcome, the horse riding to victory, and an appearance before the magistrates. And the account in an appendix to F. V. Follett's *History of the Royal Grammar School, Worcester*<sup>26</sup>, gives the story of debt, seizure, assault and theft – but concludes that Gordon was not allowed to ride the mare, and that he was saved from the magistrates by Oliver's paying £30.

Everybody seems agreed that it was a famous episode, even if they are not unanimous that it was a famous victory. It does seem likely that something happened, but where and what are now lost forever. If, as most of the accounts claim, whatever happened was the reason for Gordon's emigration to Australia, the legend is an important one, not just for Gordon's own biography, but for the history of Australian literature. But legends have to be handled carefully as history. This is one that has ingredients pretty basic to the Australian image – impatience with the law, settling the matter by a fight, the outdoor life, and, of course, horseracing; and perhaps these ingredients explain its recurrence in its many forms, rather than fidelity to Gordon's life. And yet Gordon's life contained the same features – which perhaps account for some of his popularity. The legend still persists – and its forms flourish. What is interesting is how the different versions sprang up so quickly. Perhaps it suggests something about the rapid differentiation of oral tales. Certainly, oral tales are all that we have. An examination of a contemporary account of the Crowle steeplechase for 11 May 1852 (the place and date that Sladen decided were the actual ones) only adds to the possibilities for confusion and confirms the irretrievability of the truth.



The report appeared in *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 12 May 1852:

The gallant master of the Worcestershire hounds, anxious to make a demonstration at the termination of the Hunt, and also to afford some sport in his immediate neighbourhood, caused a gathering yesterday on the Crowle estate and immediately opposite his mansion, by having amateur steeple chases, which proved extremely gratifying to parties living in the vicinity, and also to many of the citizens of Worcester, who attended. Three good races were the result, over a 'course' comprising about 3 miles of fair hunting country. For the first of these five horses started, for the second, seven, and for the third, five. Horses were entered in fictitious, and the riders rode under assumed names, so we may be excused from entering into a detailed statement of winners or losers. Suffice it to say that the heats were well contested and the entire proceedings conducted in a highly creditable manner. The worthy major's hospitality was heartily displayed on the occasion, and formed the subject of merited and oft-repeated encomium.

*Southerly*, 25, 1965.

# The Relics of Adam Lindsay Gordon

It was during the nineteenth century that writers achieved celebrity status. 'I woke up and found myself famous,' Lord Byron famously remarked. Anonymous publication became less common as writers were elevated to occupy the space once reserved for religion and the religious. And one of the intriguing side effects of this has been the preservation of objects and associations related to writers and other artists. For centuries relics of saints and martyrs had been reverently preserved. Now writers were offered a similar treatment.

Adam Lindsay Gordon, famed as much for his steeplechase riding as for his poetry, offers a striking Australian example of this secular hagiography. Researching my documentary, *Wild Bleak Bohemia: Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall*, I was continually amazed at the extent of the relics that had been preserved over the years.<sup>1</sup> A briefcase and a cabbage-tree hat that belonged to Clarke, and a Bible given to Kendall by Margaretta, widow of Nicol Stenhouse, have both survived; but it is Gordon whose relics have been most religiously collected. As might be expected, his widow made a point of treasuring many of his possessions. In 1887 C. D. Mackellar visited her and recorded: 'Round the walls of her sitting-room were various of Gordon's poems printed on slips, framed and glazed, and probably they first were printed in this form, and it is possible that some in this form may have escaped notice. She had all the editions of his poems. Also on the walls hung pen and ink sketches done by him, principally of horses or bush scenes; and as well his smoking cap, jockey cap, whips, bat, spurs, etc.'<sup>2</sup> Her son by her second marriage, W. Park Low, records in his unpublished life of Gordon that his mother retained Gordon's silver-mounted whip that he had won so many races with, together with his short boot-top leggings, his double bit, curb and double bridle and various other small items.<sup>3</sup>

Some of these memorabilia together with extensive press cuttings and a typescript of W. Park Low's biography are now in the State Library of South Australia. There are others in Dingley Dell, the cottage near Port MacDonnell in South Australia where Gordon and his wife lived for a while. The cottage was

acquired for preservation by the South Australian government in 1922, Lorraine Day records in *Gordon of Dingley Dell*.<sup>4</sup> It is now the Dingley Dell Cottage and Museum, housing Gordon's steel-nibbed quill pens, piano (a Bord), squeeze-box, the baton, handcuffs and leggings he used as a trooper, the saddle of his wife Maggie, and other memorabilia.

Other relics were religiously preserved by individuals who knew Gordon, like his old friend William Trainor, interviewed by the *Bendigo Advertiser* in 1908.

The old man lit his pipe, and, moving some harness and brushes off a large tin trunk in his room, he raised the lid, and hauled out some leather trappings.

'Do you know what these are?' he said. 'They're Gordon's saddle-bags. He gave them to me when he was going away once.'

'He said, "Billy, I want to give you something to remember me by."

'I said, "Oh, I don't need anything to remember you by, Gordon."

'He then offered me the copyright of his poems, but he found there was no copyright of them, so he left his saddle-bags with me.'<sup>5</sup>

Some forty-two years later, 23 May 1950, the *Herald* reported that William's son Tommy Trainor 'Has the Poet Gordon's Saddle-Bag': 'I have the saddle-bag at home. My father gave it to me. I don't know where it is exactly, but Mum knows. She looks after things like that.'<sup>6</sup>

*The Record*, 25 June 1910, reported on 'Gordon's stockwhip after sixty years':

An old colonist named Mrs Annie Lauder ... is the possessor of this most interesting relic. We have seen it, and it is in a wonderful state of preservation. It was made by Gordon, Johnnie Bright and Edward Bright, brothers of Mrs Lauder ... The stockwhip is splendidly made from the raw green hide of a wild bullock, and judges say that it is a work of art. Miss Bright was always the custodian of the whip, as Gordon more frequently used a heavier one.<sup>7</sup>

Two years later, 27 February 1912, *The Argus* reported:

Some interesting mementoes of the poet Gordon were procured last week by Mr W. Farmer Whyte, who visited Brighton ... the poet's bank-book (which, contrary to the general belief shows that he was at one time possessed of considerable means), some of Gordon's verses that have never been published, and portions of the original draft of his 'Rhyme of Joyous Garde'... Included among the interesting mementoes secured is a green-hide riding whip, said to have been made by the poet himself, and used in some of his steeplechase rides, made famous in his verses.

In 1962 a whip belonging to Gordon was presented to the Victoria Racing Club,

John Pacini records in his history of the VRC.<sup>8</sup>

Hugh McCrae, the son of Gordon's friend George Gordon McCrae, wrote in the *Bulletin*, 30 January 1929:

Born into this world six years after the Centaur Laureate's death, I have yet been able to see something of him, tangible and real; a lock of hair forming a ring upon white paper. From my father, this ring passed to Grace Jennings Carmichael; from Grace Jennings to God-knows-whom. I remember a Mrs Lauder who sent McCrae honey out of the country accompanied by letters (interminably long) all about Gordon; she it was who had cropped and saved the treasured curl.<sup>9</sup>

The *Sun-News Pictorial* reported, 23 September 1935: 'The case in which Adam Lindsay Gordon carried his racing gear will be placed among the other relics of the poet in the Gordon Memorial Cottage at Ballarat today. The case was presented by the Melbourne jockey, R. Lewis.' It is now held in the Gold Museum at Ballarat.

Gordon lived at Ballarat from 1867–68, leasing the livery stables attached to Craig's Hotel. A wooden plaque in the saloon bar and a circular metal plaque above the door of the Commercial Room commemorate Gordon. The four-roomed timber cottage attached to the hotel's stables in Bath Street, where Gordon first lived, was moved to the Ballarat Botanical Gardens in 1934. Since 1992 it has been an outlet for local crafts, the Adam Lindsay Gordon Craft Cottage, and contains some memorabilia. There is a bust of Gordon by Wallace Anderson near it, and another memorial of a charging horse with the inscription 'Erected by the Adam Lindsay Gordon Society to mark the centenary of the poet's living in Ballarat, also as a memorial to the 958,000 horses and mules killed in the First World War, including 169,000 that left these shores never to return.'

Attempts to preserve the house at 10, Lewis Street, Brighton, where Gordon and his wife had lived after leaving Ballarat, were unsuccessful. After it was demolished in 1946, Dr Cyril Goode salvaged the 25,000 bricks and transported them to his home at Newport. He had hoped to have the house re-erected, but the Mayor of Brighton declared: 'A man who is behind in his rent is not worth remembering.' The newsletter of the Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee, *The Wayfarer*, 8 December 2008, reported that the bricks are currently stored on an industrial estate at Dandenong. The *Herald*, 9 November 1946, reporting on the attempt to preserve the house, noted 'even the stretcher on which it is said the dead poet was

carried from the beach at Middle Brighton has been presented to the Knight Grand Cheese of the Bread and Cheese Club (Mr J. K. Moir) for preservation.'

A proposal to preserve the outbuilding of the Marine Hotel at Brighton, in which his body had lain, was similarly unsuccessful. But his association with the Marine Hotel was commemorated by a plaque: 'Adam Lindsay Gordon Poet and Horseman tethered his horse to this hitching post during his residence in Brighton 1869–70. A shining soul with syllables of fire who sang the first great songs these lands can claim (Kendall). Preserved and dedicated to his memory by the United Licensed Victuallers Association 20th October 1945.'<sup>10</sup>

By 2018 the hitching post was in a sorry state, eroded partly by weather and partly by years of cigarettes being stubbed out on it. The Melbourne Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee launched an appeal for \$500 to restore it, and the money was rapidly raised.

In 'The Sick Stockrider' Gordon had written 'Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave'. In 1870 a monument by J. Simmonds was erected over his grave in Brighton Cemetery, and a black wattle was planted there by Elizabeth A. Lauder. When the wattle died two more were planted. Over the next thirty years she tended the grave, and distributed seeds from the wattle and its successors for planting to Victorian schools. J. K. Moir sent out 2000 packages of thirty seeds each all over Australia. A century later a seedling was planted at Gordon's old school in Worcester. 12 September 1910 *The Argus* reported a pilgrimage to Gordon's grave. It became an annual event, with an attendance of 4000 by 1921. The custom has now been revived by the Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee.

The preservation of the relics and the introduction of the pilgrimage were given a further hagiographical touch in 1934 with the installation in Westminster Abbey of a bronze bust of Gordon by Kathleen Scott, later Lady Hilton Young, widow of Scott of the Antarctic. A copy in the sculptor's personal collection cast from the same mould was presented to the Commonwealth of Australia by her second husband, Lord Kennet, in 1950. He offered it first to Australia House in London, then to Parliament House, Canberra, and it ended up finally in the National Library. A replication of the Westminster Abbey bust was unveiled at Penola in 2005. In addition there is the statue by Paul Montford in Spring Street, Melbourne, the obelisk above the Blue Lake near Mount Gambier, and memorials in Coleraine, Brighton Town Hall gardens, Cheltenham College, and the Worcester Royal

Grammar School; as well as paintings and sketches of Gordon by Thomas Lyttleton, Harry Stockdale, Sir Frank Madden and others, to say nothing of the illustrations and musical settings inspired by his life and his poems. No doubt there are further items I have missed and failed to record.

Such are the relics of Adam Lindsay Gordon.

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# Adam Lindsay Gordon and Father Julian Tenison Woods

Father Julian Tenison Woods is most often remembered today for his association with St Mary MacKillop and the establishment of the Institute of St Joseph. In those same years Woods became a close friend of the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon. His 'Personal Reminiscence of Adam Lindsay Gordon' in the *Melbourne Review* in 1884, is one of the major records of Gordon's life.<sup>1</sup> 'I think I may say that for five years I was the only intimate friend he had in the bush,' Woods recalled.

Julian Tenison Woods was born to Irish parents in London in 1832. In 1850 he entered the Passionist order at Broadway in Worcestershire, then went to France where he joined a Marist novitiate, and later taught at a naval college in Toulon. In 1855 he came to Australia. After working as a subeditor on the *Adelaide Times*, Woods studied with the Jesuits at Sevenhills, and in January 1857 was ordained as a priest. For the next ten years he ministered to the diocese of Penola. It was here that he met Gordon and Mary MacKillop.

Gordon was born in 1833 into a British military family. His father wrote: 'My father, grandfather, brothers, six uncles and all their sons, twenty of us, have all been brought up for the Army, and half of these have been killed or died in foreign countries or on foreign service.' While at the Royal Grammar School in Worcester Gordon entered a steeplechase. The horse had been impounded for debt, so Gordon broke into the stables and liberated it. His exasperated father packed him off to Australia, where he served in the South Australian Mounted Police for two years, based in Penola. In 1855 he set up on his own, buying, selling and breaking in horses, travelling from bush station to station.

Woods recalled:

I became acquainted with poor Gordon in 1857. I had then charge of a large district called the new country. It was comprised between the coast line of South Australia and the boundary line of the Victorian colony, enclosed on the north by the River Murray. This tract included about 22,000 square miles of country, more than half of which was desert. The remaining portion being taken up as sheep and cattle runs. Gordon was occupied as a horse-breaker

and dealer, and at the races in the various bush townships he used to ride as a jockey, but only in steeplechases and hurdle races.

My introduction to him was at a cattle station, Lake Hawdon, near Guichen Bay. He was breaking in a few horses for Mr Stockdale, the proprietor. I arrived at the station in the evening, and he was at work, I remember, in the stock-yard, sitting a young colt which was making surprising efforts to throw him. I watched the struggle for some minutes, and it ended by the girths breaking, and Gordon landed on his feet. We met that evening at supper, for in those days master and man, stranger and guest, all sat at the same table and shared the same fare. I remember little about Gordon that evening except that he was painfully near-sighted. He scarcely spoke. After supper he came to me upon the verandah and chatted for an hour; and I was surprised to find that his conversation was not about the usual station topics, but about poetry and poets. I was much interested and inquired who he was ...

Harry Stockdale, the nephew of the station proprietor, recalled in *The Argus*:

I was present on the now historic night when the Rev. J. Tenison Woods came to Old Lake Hawdon station and sat talking with Gordon till past midnight. They talked of their favourite authors – of home associations and schoolboy days – Gordon regretting that he had not gone into the army, where he would have had an aim in life congenial to his inclination. Tenison Woods said ... that the whole tenor of his life was changed through coming in touch with the famous Newman. Prior to this I understood him to say he belonged to the English Church.

They also talked of the antiquity of man and either soon after or just before, Tenison Woods delivered a lecture at Robe on the same subject. Gordon that night said 'Look here Father, what does it matter? Old or young it all comes to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die.'<sup>2</sup>

'Next morning he overtook me as I rode on my journey,' Woods recalled:

As soon as we could talk, he plunged into poetry again. To my astonishment, he began to recite long passages from Virgil, Ovid and Homer. His pronunciation of the Greek was so peculiar that I could not understand him ... He questioned me about French authors, and then recited long passages from Racine's *Athalie* and Corneille's *Cid*.

'After that day we often met,' Woods wrote.

My duties consisted in going from station to station, often long distances apart, and separated by little known and desert country. It was always a great advantage to have a companion, if it were only because the horses travelled better, and two heads are better than one in crossing difficult country. But to meet with a companion like Gordon was quite a treat. He was so remarkably shy and



retiring that he scarcely ever came to see me at my house, that is when I had a house ...

I remember his telling me that he knew very little of Horace, and so I gave him a small pocket edition. When next I met him he had learnt a good many of the odes, and recited them for me as we rode along ... He used always to carry a book with him in his pocket, and generally it was a Latin classic. It will be easily understood how soon the volume became knocked to pieces in this way. Whatever books I lent him were generally returned in a most dilapidated condition, yet I could not complain when I saw how well used they had been.

Meeting Woods crucially stimulated Gordon's poetic development. 'This friendship revived in Gordon the love for classical literature which pervades his verses,' A. W. Jose wrote in his *History of Australasia*.<sup>3</sup> Gordon's biographers agree. 'Meeting Tenison Woods made a profound change in Gordon's life. He was the first really intellectual man the poet had met since he left England,' Douglas Sladen wrote,<sup>4</sup> and Geoffrey Hutton concurred: 'the chance meeting was a stimulus both to his reading and his writing ... His friendship reopened a door which had been closed.'<sup>5</sup>

Gordon's contemporaries remarked on his amazing memory. Woods recalled an example:

We were overtaken by a severe storm and lost our way. Night came on, and the rain poured down in torrents. As my sight at night was nearly as defective as Gordon's we gave up looking for the track, and sat crouched under a tree waiting for the rising of the moon. We were both miserably cold and hungry, and it was most ludicrous to hear my companion reciting long passages from various authors on the subject of storms. We could not light a fire, and I only had to shiver while he gave me the tempest scene in *King Lear*, which he knew by heart. He was much amused when I asked him whether he would like a nice drink of cold spring water after his exertions. We got to a station about midnight and had to share the same room; but Gordon would not go to bed. The warm tea we had had at supper had revived him, and he kept walking up and down the supper room reciting *Childe Harold* till near morning.

Woods shows no amazement at Gordon's memory, having inherited and developed a similar memory himself, as George O'Neill records.<sup>6</sup>

Woods continued his account of Gordon:

He was remarked as being unsociable in his habits. He would prefer riding by himself, unless he would meet with a congenial companion, and when alone used to saunter along slowly, very seldom putting his horse out of

a walk. I believe now that it was at these times that he was composing his poetry. He hinted this to me, but I never could get him to show me any of his compositions.

The friendship of Woods and Gordon was important to both of them, often isolated in the bush, yearning for literary companionship. The *Australian Monthly Magazine*, May 1867, recorded:

The literary proclivities of the Rev. Mr Woods are evidently hereditary; many of his near relatives having been occupied, and are still occupying, proud positions on the English press. His father, a barrister of the Middle Temple, has been connected for over thirty years with the London *Times*; his eldest brother was long engaged upon the same journal and subsequently upon *The Argus*; whilst a second brother, Mr N. A. Woods, will be readily remembered as the colleague of Dr Russell in the Crimea, and afterwards as special correspondent of *The Times*, on the occasion of the visit of HRH the Prince of Wales to the American continent.<sup>7</sup>

Woods had begun appearing in print in 1857, writing about Australian flora and geology in the *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria*. In 1862 his *Geological Observations in South Australia* was published in London. His *History of the Discovery and Exploration of Australia* appeared in 1865. In 1864 Gordon launched into print with his ballad *The Feud*<sup>8</sup> and in 1866 he published three poems in *Bell's Life*, and two in the Melbourne weekly *The Australasian*, which now became a regular publication venue for both Gordon and Woods.

Meanwhile in 1860, eighteen-year-old Mary MacKillop had come to work as a governess for her uncle and aunt at Penola. In *An Extraordinary Australian: Mary MacKillop*, Paul Gardiner quotes her account of meeting Woods: 'I heard the pastor from the altar speak of the neglected state of children of his parish – and I had to go and offer myself to aid him as far as the nature of my other duties would permit.'<sup>9</sup> In her *Julian Tenison Woods: A Life*, completed by 1903 but not published until 1997, she quotes from their ensuing correspondence.<sup>10</sup> Woods outlined his scheme to educate the children of the poor, and a school was established in Penola in 1861. 'By a singular dispensation, I am appointed Director General of Catholic Education, Chairman of the Board, and Inspector of Schools throughout the diocese,' he wrote to her in 1866.<sup>11</sup> That year the teaching order, the Sisters of St Joseph, was founded.

In 1862 Gordon married Margaret Park. Woods recalled:

Nothing ever surprised me so much. Of all my acquaintance, he was least like a marrying man ... He smiled in his usual quiet way, as I told him of my surprise, and said that there was no romance about his love-making. He had met his wife at a place where he stayed frequently ... He said that he noticed that she was a very respectable and industrious girl, who would make him a good, thrifty housekeeper. A few days before he married, he said one morning, as he was leaving, 'Well, girl, I like your ways. You seem industrious and sensible. If you like, I will take a cottage at Robe, and we will get married next week, and you shall keep home for me.

This was the whole history of the matter, he said. The girl consented, and they were married a few days after.

'I was just eighteen years when we were married,' Margaret told *The Advertiser*, 23 March 1912.<sup>12</sup> Woods felt she looked even younger:

'When I called upon him some time afterwards, I was introduced to a small, slim, rather good-looking lassie, in appearance about fifteen years of age. Gordon had a strange habit of addressing her as 'girl', which sounded a little odd before visitors, though it was appropriate in one sense.'

Then, in 1865, Woods had a bright idea:

I persuaded Gordon to allow himself to be nominated for the electorate ... The electors were searching on every side for a local representative, but this was difficult to find, where every squatter was too busy for anything but his station work ... Gordon was the only man who had the time and money for the work, and he was unanimously fixed upon ... but he declined to stand ... He consulted me on the subject, and I prevailed upon him to accept the position. I must say that my advice was mainly for his own sake. I thought it would give him occupation, which he evidently needed, and might open to him a successful, if not a brilliant career. I must own, too, that he had shown a tendency to a morbid melancholy about which I was not without apprehensions. He used to complain a good deal that he was not in any useful career. That his life was being wasted, and so forth, and he indulged more and more his solitary habits, walking and riding alone, or sitting for hours by the seaside.

After eighteen months Gordon resigned. His fellow parliamentarian John Riddoch recalled in *The Advertiser*, 19 August 1895:

My colleague was a very ready speaker, but he was not an orator. He was immensely popular everywhere he went. He had a remarkable memory, and after listening to a speech could repeat it all off almost word for word. He used to amuse himself a lot when the House was sitting in writing verses and making sketches, but he did not find the political atmosphere particularly congenial.<sup>13</sup>

Gordon's wife told *The Advertiser*: 'He soon became weary of public life. He was too quiet and reserved for that kind of existence, and the necessity of attending regularly at sittings of the assembly was very irksome.'

Woods recalled:

He spoke of trying to get literary employment on a newspaper, and had made up his mind to resign his seat in Parliament and go to Melbourne to reside. He had at this time published some more verses which had gained for him quite a name. He was very proud of those efforts, and I noticed more self-assertion, and, if I may use the expression, more personal vanity about his talents than ever I observed before. He said, amongst other things, that he was sure he would rise to the top of the tree in poetry, and that the world should talk about him before he died. He made great use of the Parliamentary library. All his spare time was taken up in reading classics and the best English and French poets.

The last time they met, Woods recalled, 'the conversation turned upon novel writing, at which he was going to try his hand.' After he left South Australia, Woods recalled: 'I heard from him repeatedly.'

In 1867 Gordon published two volumes of poetry, *Ashtaroath* and *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*.<sup>14</sup> He became partner in a livery stables at Craig's Hotel in Ballarat. But the business was badly managed, Gordon suffered a severe fall and was bedridden, during which time his infant daughter died. In 1868 he sold up and moved to Melbourne. He continued to ride competitively and that year he achieved the legendary feat of winning three races on the same day at the Melbourne Hunt Club meet.

By 1870 both Woods and Gordon were heavily in debt and struggling with their demons. *The Southern Cross*, the magazine Woods had been running, ceased publication in 1870, leaving him responsible for its debts. Other debts had been incurred for the Sisters of St Joseph and for housing for the community of men he had founded. Woods had insisted the sisters should own no property; but someone had to provide accommodation for them. Margaret Press writes in *Julian Tenison Woods: 'Father Founder'*: 'He had borrowed from the banks for these building projects at a high rate of interest; even when he paid in over £800 which he had received from his publishers, the amount owing on mortgage and interest had crept beyond £3500.'<sup>15</sup>

Sister Mary MacKillop was now in Brisbane. George O'Neill in his *Life of the Reverend Julian Edmund Tenison Woods* quotes a letter Woods wrote to her, 20 June 1870:

The other night ... three beings entered my room in the dark, and without my

being able to resist or cry out, carried and placed me in some conveyance there was outside – a very common and rough cart – and hurried me away at a great rate down past the gaol to the banks of the Torrens below North Adelaide. Here the ground seemed to open and I was taken to an awful place, the horror of which I cannot described ... I was paralysed with fear. I felt that I was in the hands of the devil and had done with this world. It was surely death in life. I was then taken to this awful place, and one of the beings seized me and said that I had died suddenly and that my body and soul were now to be cast into hell for all eternity for having worshipped a creature; and at this moment a fearful serpent twined itself round my waist and said that I was his for ever. I still feel the awful, stifling pressure of that serpent ...

They dragged me towards the fire and tormented me in many ways for three hours; but the name of Mary, though it seemed to redouble their fury, weakened their efforts ... My guardian angel brought me back and healed my wounds and bruises.

He conceded that he had ‘ever since been troubled lest it might be an illusion’ but nonetheless, he told Mary MacKillop, ‘I say to you that I solemnly assert in the names of Jesus and Mary that all I tell you is literally true.’

21 June he wrote again: ‘My dear Sister Mary, if I have tried your credulity by what I wrote yesterday, I shall try it very much more by what I shall write today ...’ Having fallen asleep,

I was very rudely awoke by a devil – the one which usually assaults me and whom I believe to be a fallen spirit of a very high order. He was like a hideous dog but walking erect with like human limbs. He had a drawn sword of a very wide blade in his hand – a kind of sharp, heavy scimitar ... He gave me a blow on the left leg above the foot and nearly severed it. I began to bleed, as you may imagine, and soon I was in a pool of blood ... he stood mocking me and gibing for a quarter of an hour, and then suddenly seemed to get into a fury and struck me across the stomach, burying the sword in my body and laying open the intestines. I felt that my hour was come ...

But then Mary herself intervened and healed him completely. She told him that after his death

the scars of these wounds would be plainly visible upon my body. My guardian angel removed everything from the bed that was stained with blood, and placed other things perfectly similar there. Even the boards of the floor were removed and others like them placed there. I am sure these blood-stained things will be found again some day. Our gentle Mother then told me to be of good courage and said that in a few days a great sum or money would be placed in my hands to meet all my wants ...

At the very same time Gordon was in similarly dire straits. He was deeply in debt. His claim on a Scottish baronetcy and estate, in pursuing which he had accumulated substantial legal bills, proved invalid. He had suffered another serious fall in a horse race in March 1870, writing to John Riddoch: 'I don't think I shall get over this fall easily, & you know, old fellow, I'm not likely to complain more than need be; but I am hurt inside somewhere, I think.'<sup>16</sup> 23 June 1870 Gordon called in at his printer's. A. H. Massina recalled:

He expected some money on the day his last book, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, was published.

He owed me about £75, and said to me, 'I suppose you want some money.' And I replied, 'Printers generally do.'

Gordon said, 'Well, I'll be up in the morning with a cheque.'<sup>17</sup>

But the cheque never came. 25 June, *The Argus* reported 'that Mr A. L. Gordon, the well-known poet and gentleman steeplechase rider, had committed suicide by shooting himself in the scrub near the Brighton beach.' Woods wrote:

the dreadful news reached me of the manner in which he put an end to his career. I must say, however, that it did not surprise me. In my intercourse with him of late years I had noticed a morbid melancholy growing more upon him. My own opinion was that he had kept up appearances until pecuniary and legal embarrassments came upon him, and then gave up to despondency. His difficulties could not have been great; but he could not bear to apply to friends, or that anyone should know his real position. Those who did not know Gordon attributed his suicide to drink, but I repeat he was most temperate, and disliked the company of drinking men.

Woods's own troubles continued. They were many, and they are enumerated in the biographies by Mary Mackillop, George O'Neill and Margaret Press. Amidst them all, despite indifferent health, he continued his religious work and his scientific work, and from 1883–86 he was surveying and reporting on the botany and geology of Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan. As he told Mary Mackillop, 'Well or ill, I am always able to write.'<sup>18</sup> He died in Sydney in 1889 and is buried in Waverley cemetery.

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# Marcus Clarke

Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke was born in the London borough of Kensington on 24 April 1846. He was an only child and his mother died of tuberculosis just before his fourth birthday. He remembered nothing of her and knew none of her relatives. As a child he suffered from a disease of his left arm, ankylosis, and though it was operated on it never had full strength. He suffered too from a stammer which he never entirely overcame. Cyril Hopkins, who wrote a memoir of Clarke, recalled first meeting him while on holiday at the Isle of Wight:

Whilst looking about us, we noticed a young boy of our own age who, propped against a convenient rock with a cushion at his back, sat regarding us. He had fine, grey, searching eyes and a most winning smile, and on our approaching and speaking to him cordially responded to our timid advances. He explained that he was not allowed to run about or play like other boys because of his weak shoulder ...

It was not long before his father, a widower, attired in deep mourning, made his appearance and after a brief warning to us never to persuade Marcus to join us in digging or active play, expressed, with this limitation, his approval of the acquaintance between us ...<sup>1</sup>

Cyril and his elder brother Gerard Manley Hopkins became close friends of Clarke: all three were educated at Sir Roger Cholmeley's School at Highgate, also known as Highgate School. It was situated near Hampstead Heath, where the Prologue to *His Natural Life* is set. Clarke showed literary ambitions early and he and Gerard collaborated on a Gothic tale involving alchemy and the reanimation of the dead, for which Clarke wrote the words, and Gerard, showing more interest in drawing at this time than in the poetry for which he became famous, did the illustrations. It is as a famous painter that Gerard is portrayed in Clarke's story 'Holiday Peak.'<sup>2</sup>

William Hislop Clarke, Marcus's father, was a barrister with a good London practice in chancery, and Marcus looked forward to a comfortable allowance, a career in the Foreign Office, and a large inheritance – his cousins estimated £70,000. He planned to spend a year in France and perfect his already thorough knowledge of

the language. Throughout his life he regularly read new French writing. But when he was sixteen his father became seriously ill; he was taken to an asylum for the insane where during his last year he was apparently beyond communication. His financial affairs were found to be in complete disorder, and his supposed wealth evaporated. It is a situation Clarke draws on in his story 'Human Repetends'. With no inheritance, no private income, and no possibility of a diplomatic career, Marcus emigrated to Australia. His uncle had been governor of Western Australia in 1846 and had a son, Andrew, who was surveyor-general and chief commissioner of crown lands for Victoria from 1852 to 1857 and a member of parliament for Emerald Hill from 1858 to 1862. Andrew Clarke had just returned to England, but he still had connections in Australia. Another uncle, James Langton Clarke, who had emigrated to Australia and had become judge of the Courts of Mines and of the County Court of Ararat in 1858, was still there. So Marcus left Plymouth on 16 March 1863, his father lingering on, dying on 1 December. It was not a happy beginning to a new life in a new world, and Clarke used the motif in the Prologue to *His Natural Life*, with Dawes transported to Australia while his putative father lingers on after a stroke, dying after he has left.

Clarke arrived in Melbourne on 7 June 1863. He took up a position in a bank, the Bank of Australasia. But, like P. G. Wodehouse some thirty-eight years later, his banking career was not a success.<sup>3</sup> Then early in 1865 he went to the Wimmera district of western Victoria and spent over two years working on the sheep stations of Swinton and Ledcourt, near the small town of Glenorchy. Glenorchy served as the basis for Bullocktown, the archetypal up-country township around which he was to set a number of stories and sketches that draw on these two years he spent there. He had been writing from his arrival in Melbourne, and during his time in the Wimmera he was producing fiction and articles. In March 1866 the first of these, 'The Mantuan Apothecary', appeared in the *Australian Monthly Magazine* – a journal for which he then began to write regularly and eventually, under its new name of the *Colonial Monthly*, to edit. He used the pseudonyms Mark Scrivener (the version of his name Gerard Manley Hopkins had coined for him at school), Q (the Swinton station brand), and his own name.

In 1867 he returned to Melbourne and began writing for the *Argus* (a paper that turns up as the *Peacock* in some of his stories and journalism). It was a daily newspaper that represented the conservative, landed squattocracy; but it had,



too, with its associated weekend magazine, the *Australasian*, cultural interests. One of the earliest pieces Clarke wrote was the essay ‘Balzac and Modern French Literature’,<sup>4</sup> in which he proclaimed his enthusiasm for this favourite author of his, whose influence lies behind much of his journalism and fiction. Honoré de Balzac is one of the influences on his first novel, *Long Odds* (1869), and provides a literary model for the heroine of his story ‘La Béguine’. It is Balzac’s *La Fausse Maitresse* that the Reverend North reads in *His Natural Life* (book 4, chapter 3). And Balzac’s *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1839–47) is one of the novels of convict life that served as a model for *His Natural Life* – together with, as R. G. Howarth and Harold Boehm have shown,<sup>5</sup> Charles Reade’s novels, Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862) and Alexandre Dumas’s *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1844–45). The last is referred to in Clarke’s story ‘Holiday Peak’; while Balzac is referred to constantly – Clarke had been reading him before writing his hashish experiment, ‘Cannabis Indica’, for instance. And he wrote about him again at length, together with other French novelists, in ‘Of French Novels’ in his series ‘The Buncle Correspondence’ (*Argus*, 2 February 1872) – ‘immortal Balzac. Balzac the prince of novel writers.’ It was the pioneering, revolutionary aspect of Balzac that appealed to Clarke, the way Balzac had created a new literature – something that Clarke was to do for Australia. And the strong element of self-identification Clarke had with Balzac led to an uncanny foreshadowing of Clarke’s own fate – the prodigious energy, the prolific output, the abortive editorial schemes and the ‘one long struggle with debt and difficulty.’

On 23 November 1867 Clarke began a regular column for the *Australasian*, ‘The Peripatetic Philosopher’, over the pseudonym ‘Q’. It proved immensely successful and Clarke’s first book was a selection from it, *The Peripatetic Philosopher* (George Robertson, Melbourne, 1869), jottings on contemporary Melbourne life, on literature, on topical and controversial and amusing issues. It was under the name of ‘The Peripatetic Philosopher’ that he wrote his famous six-part series of articles, ‘Lower Bohemia’, in the *Australasian* between 12 June and 21 August 1869.<sup>6</sup> They deal with the life of the down-and-outs that most Melburnians did not know existed. They are in the best tradition of the exposé journalism Mayhew had established in London, and they show the deep humanitarian side of Clarke that was always present in his writing and that is best known from *His Natural Life*.

Clarke opens the series by distinguishing between the conventional Bohemia of those French novels of artistic life and the lower Bohemia of utter destitution.

Literary and theatrical Bohemia had its real poverties – as Clarke’s two bankruptcies were to show. But that was a Bohemia in which there was always hope – of writing another play, another article. It was a Bohemia of choice, even of make-believe. However, it was all too easy to slip from the literary Bohemia of choice into the lower Bohemia of destitution from which there was no return. The recurrence of this theme in Clarke’s writing suggests that he was writing as much for himself as for his audience, warning himself of his own possible state. There were notable precedents for him to bear in mind. Charles Whitehead, one-time friend of Charles Dickens, literary expatriate, had tried to survive as a writer in Melbourne, had sought shelter for a while in the Immigrants’ Home, and died in even worse poverty, an alcoholic, in 1862. Clarke would have known of him for Clarke’s fellow-member of the Yorick Club, J. E. Neild, had tried to look after Whitehead in his last year. Whitehead’s best known work was a novel, *Richard Savage* (1842), based on the tragic life of that eighteenth-century irresponsible, literary Bohemian, friend of Samuel Johnson. And in Clarke’s memoir of his own literary Bohemian days, ‘The Café Lutetia’, (*Weekly Times*, 28 February 1874), he takes the name Savage to describe his close friend of those years, the journalist Alfred Telo (whose obituary Clarke wrote in the *Leader*, 11 October 1867).

Another image of Bohemian ruin, the brilliant man of abilities who had no money, no security, and whose only future is the bleakness of impoverished age, was Richard Birnie. He was a fellow-member with Clarke of the Cave of Adullam, the Bohemian club that was established after the Yorick Club that Clarke had helped establish became too respectable. Together with other members of the Cave of Adullam, Birnie is given fictional portrayal in Clarke’s novel *’Twixt Shadow and Shine* (George Robertson, Melbourne, 1875; Swann Sonnenschein, London, 1893):

One hard winter Mr Erasmus Rumbelow sought – philosophically – the attic retirement of a public institution. When Spring came round and he emerged, his friends were inclined to ignore the period of hibernation. Not so Mr Rumbelow. ‘I have left my palace!’ said he. ‘I am now a member of three Universities, sir! I sign myself Erasmus Rumbelow, of Oxford, Cambridge, and the Benevolent Asylum!’

Literary Bohemia always fascinated Clarke. One of his earliest articles, ‘Austin Friars’ (*Australian Monthly Magazine*, May 1866) described the Bohemian irresponsibility of his first days in Melbourne. In ‘The Café Lutetia’ (the Melbourne

Theatre Royal's 'Café de Paris') he describes the later period of his first successes in journalism and writing, 1869–70.<sup>7</sup> In 1868 Clarke and various other writers and journalists and litterateurs established the Yorick Club, a forum for free-ranging conversation, for planning new publications, and for congenial drinking. He wrote about it in his Peripatetic Philosopher column in the *Australasian*, 9 May 1868:

I may, without breaking faith, refute the accusation made by a friend, that the members sit on tubs round the room, smoke green tea, and drink neat kerosene out of pewter pots. More I cannot reveal.

Green tea was sometimes believed to produce hallucinatory effects, and 'tea' was a slang term sometimes used for marijuana. It was around this time that Clarke wrote that amazing literary *tour de force*, 'Cannabis Indica – a Psychological Experiment' (*Colonial Monthly*, 1, 6, February 1868), in which he has a doctor observe him and make notes, while he writes a story after taking hashish in tablet form. It is one of the very few examples of drug literature in which the processes of writing were recorded by an objective observer simultaneously with its composition. It shows Clarke's fascination with experimentation, and with the Romantic exploration of different levels of consciousness. Here the influences are the ethos of Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822, 1856), a work Clarke mentions in the story. He mentions, too, the English painter John Martin's illustration to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* of Pandemonium, the Palace of Satan, hanging over the bookcase. It was a painting that the English Romantic poets who had used drugs particularly responded to.<sup>8</sup> In another story, 'Pretty Dick', Clarke gives a classic description of an out-of-body experience: the child waking at dawn to find himself up in the sky looking down at his body below. From the childhood tale of reanimating the dead that he collaborated on with Gerard Manley Hopkins, through the original beginning of the serial version of *His Natural Life* in which Richard Devine is involved in experiments with alchemy, Clarke showed this fascination with the metaphysical and the mysterious.

Nineteenth-century Bohemia involved the theatre – not just the Theatre Royal's Café de Paris, but the whole ambience of the theatrical world. Clarke wrote and translated and adapted and collaborated on more than twenty plays, only a handful of which were ever published and some only in synopsis form. His wife, Marian Dunn, whom he married on 22 July 1869, was a well-known and popular actress.

She came from an Irish theatrical family. Her father John Dunn was a comedian and her sister Rose and her brother John were both on the stage. Clarke's mother, too, supposedly came from a family connected with the theatre, and his daughter, Marian Marcus Clarke, also went on the stage, primarily in North America, though she did return to Australia to play Rufus Dawes's mother in the 1927 film of *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

Playwriting was one of the ways Clarke hoped to make money. Editing and publishing magazines was one of the ways he lost it. The *Colonial Monthly*, which he edited from March 1868 proved a financial disaster, and he relinquished it in September 1869 – only immediately to start a new comic weekly, *Humbug*, which survived until January 1870. His editorship of the *Australian Journal*, from March 1870 until September 1871, apparently proved similarly unprofitable for the publishers, who noted in the September 1872 *Journal* that 'successful novelists, dramatists, poets or other writers of fiction, or imagination, have uniformly proved decided failures when they have tried their hands at the practical business of editing a journal.'

In January 1870 the *Argus* group sent Clarke to Tasmania to research a series of articles on the convict days for them. It was a chance for a holiday, it helped him visualise the settings for the articles he was researching in the Melbourne Public Library, and it provided the direct experience of the settings and material for his novel *His Natural Life*.

The articles began to appear as the series 'Old Stories Retold' by 'Q' in the *Australasian* on 19 February 1870. All but two of them had appeared by October, some in multiple parts over two or three weeks, and the last, 'An Australian Crusoe' was published in three parts in June 1871. There were fourteen altogether, and with a fifteenth added they were collected in book form as *Old Tales of a Young Country* (Mason, Firth & McCutcheon, Melbourne, 1871).<sup>9</sup> The serial *His Natural Life* began in the *Australian Journal* for March 1870 and ran until June 1872. But Clarke's personal account of his visit, 'Port Arthur', did not appear until 1873, when he published a three-part article in the *Argus*, (3, 12, 26 July) to mark the 'final dismantling of the last relic which he inspected with so much interest three years ago.'

The personal account makes explicit Clarke's emotional reaction to the horrors of the convict settlement. His feelings are clear enough in *Old Tales* and *His Natural Life*, but the account of actually visiting Blind Mooney at Port Arthur gives the

fictional presentation of him in *His Natural Life* a new dimension. It is another, insistent, painful reminder of the hideous reality of the sources of this great novel. Clarke never collected the 'Port Arthur' articles. His reference to the 1830 Tasmanian 'war of extermination, known as the Black War' in his first article provoked angry correspondence, with the result that the *Australasian* did not reprint it from the *Argus*, and Hamilton Mackinnon similarly reprinted only the second and third articles in his *Austral Edition of the Selected Works of Marcus Clarke* (Fergusson and Mitchell, Melbourne, 1890).<sup>10</sup>

The indictment of the brutality of the convict system is a major part of Clarke's purpose in *Old Tales* and *His Natural Life*. But he also had a pioneering literary purpose. The title of the series of articles, 'Old Stories Retold', and the title of the book, *Old Tales of a Young Country*, together recall Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1837, 1842). Indeed, Clarke calls 'The Last of Macquarie Harbour' 'this twice-told tale.' He was trying to do for Australia the sort of thing that Hawthorne had done for America – to show that the young country had all the resources of romance, myth and history that the old world had. He makes the early years of Australia seem mysterious, romantic, and strange, yet objectively there were fewer than one hundred years of European settlement. The result was something very different from Hawthorne's 'pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade – the coolness of a meditative habit.' There is little that is pale, cool or meditative in Clarke's narratives; they seethe with a fierce, bright passion as he indicts the barbarity of the convict system. But at the same time as he makes his indictment, he is abstracting, as his Preface to the volume announced, from the 'rude, adventurous life of those early colonial days' the 'romantic which it induced.'

Clarke was concerned to demonstrate the falsity of the old and frequent charge that there were no materials of romance on hand for the Australian writer. Frederick Sinnett had made the definitive statement of this in *The Fiction Fields of Australia* in 1856.<sup>11</sup>

No storied windows, richly dight, cast a dim, religious light over any Australian premises. There are no ruins for that rare old plant, the ivy green, to creep over and make his dainty meal of. No Australian author can hope to extricate his hero or heroines, however pressing the emergency may be, by means of a spring panel and a subterranean passage, or such like relics of feudal barons, and refuges of modern novelists, and the offspring of their imagination. There may be plenty of dilapidated buildings, but not one, the dilapidation of which

is sufficiently venerable by age, to tempt the wandering footsteps of the most arrant parvenu of a ghost that ever walked by night.

But Gothic medievalism is not the only setting for romance. There was also a 'romance of reality.' Clarke had applied the phrase to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in his final 'Lower Bohemia' article, 'In Outer Darkness', and he applied it again to the work of Charles Dickens in the obituary he wrote for the *Argus*, 18 July 1870, in the midst of writing his 'Old Stories Retold.'<sup>12</sup> His espousal of the 'romance of reality' of Dickens against the 'medieval romance' of Sir Walter Scott indicates the stance he was taking in these tales. Clarke does not reject romance; but he looks for it in new areas. And the extraordinary characters and adventures he deals with demonstrate that Australia had as rich a store of romantic material for the novelist and historian as the old world. Clarke indeed demonstrated that himself in a further way by drawing on the tales he had retold for incidents in *His Natural Life*. The mutiny that the Irish actor and pickpocket George Barrington thwarted on board the convict ship sailing to Australia suggests the mutiny that Rufus Dawes discovers and reveals. The hallucinatory horrors of conscience that the escaped convict turned bushranger Michael Howe suffers on the Tasmanian mountains in 'The Rule of the Bushranger' suggest those that John Rex experiences in the blowhole. And in the appendix to the book version of *His Natural Life* Clarke cites 'The Seizure of the Cyprus' and 'The Last of Macquarie Harbour', two tales that jointly provide the basis for John Rex's seizure of the *Osprey*, escape to South America, and discovery in London, and for Rufus Dawes's building the coracle to save the party abandoned by the convicts.

They are two tales that show, also, the importantly international nature of these heroes and villains of romance. Clarke was asserting that Australian history had as much romantic material as other histories; he is putting it on a par with other national myths; and he is asserting this by stressing the international nature of that early history. The convicts in these two tales roam through Australasia, South America, China and Britain; and the characters of the other tales travel through England, Ireland, Iceland, Denmark, France, the United States, Japan and the Pacific. These figures whose lives touched on Australia in her early days possessed this range of international connections. The young country was not a closed, provincial, parochial society, but part of the map of world-wide itinerants – men of

fortune, buccaneers, confidence tricksters, the ceaseless tribe of the footloose. And this is something that Clarke stresses by his wide-ranging literary allusions, drawing analogies with the Antipodean characters from English, European and American writing, implicitly suggesting that Australian writing has the materials with which to establish itself in that international context.<sup>13</sup>

Though Clarke was drawing on the documentary materials he had researched for *Old Tales* when he was writing *His Natural Life*, convictism was not the total concern of the original serial version of the novel. Book I in the serial consisted of a 40,000-word account of the events leading up to Richard Devine's transportation, before he takes on the name of Rufus Dawes. Devine is travelling with the alchemist Hans Blinzler; they stay overnight at Joe Mogford's Bell Inn in High Holborn, London. They are observed to quarrel, and in the morning Hans is found murdered and robbed. The innocent Devine is found guilty of the murder; but the judge expresses doubts about his guilt, and his lawyer manages to get the death sentence commuted to transportation for life. It emerges at the end of the serial that Devine concealed his true identity to protect Hans's daughter whom Devine had married, but fallen out of love with and left. The circumstantial evidence that he murdered Hans is so strong that he does not want her to believe that her husband has not only left her but also murdered her father. Nor does he want her to discover that her father is not a successful alchemist but, it is likely to appear, a common swindler. These motivations for Devine's suppression of his true identity are not only weak, but arbitrary; they offer no larger metaphorical or symbolic meanings, nor are they persuasive on a literal level.

The serial continued for another 100,000 or so words after the Norfolk Island hurricane. In the revised version of the novel published in book form in 1874, Dawes and Sylvia drown in the hurricane and the novel ends. In the original serial Sylvia (called Dora in this first version) drowns. But Dawes survives and saves Dorcas, the daughter of Dora and Maurice Frere. Dorcas, born in the colony, represents even more strongly than Sylvia of the book version (as Brian Elliott argued)<sup>14</sup> the new, positive hopes of the Australian settlement. Dawes adopts yet another identity as Tom Crosbie, a shepherd. He remembers Blind Mooney's words about a goldfield Mooney had discovered in one of his escapes – and sure enough finds gold, just before its discovery is proclaimed. The alchemical theme introduced in the opening, the search for gold, is now fulfilled.<sup>15</sup> Crosbie cannily sets up not a goldmine but a

general store, and makes his fortune. We see his growing success that leads to his establishing himself as a Melbourne man of property. And we see his protective love for the young Dorcas who, reaching adolescence, falls in love with Arthur Vern – none other than the son of the younger brother of Richard Devine (aka Rufus Dawes), in Australia under an assumed name. Arthur has been dispossessed of his inheritance by the return to England of the missing Richard Devine, who is not Devine himself but the villain John Rex doing an imposture modelled on the contemporary Tichborne case.

Clarke salvages the narrative of Rex's impersonation of Devine from the serial. He moves it backwards in time to make it contemporaneous with Dawes's imprisonment on Norfolk Island; and in the book version he strengthens the physical similarity of Rex and Devine/Dawes by making them half-brothers, both illegitimate offspring of Lord Bellasis.

The major interest of the post-Norfolk Island material in the serial lies in its positive note – the successful escape from the convict world, the fresh air of the new Australian settlement. Frere satisfyingly gets his comeuppance, being trampled to death by convicts, just as his real-life model John Price did.<sup>16</sup> We are given a potted history of post-convict Australia; we even see the Eureka Stockade. What is especially emphasised is the development of the new nation to prosperity, as it moves through its pastoral, gold-mining and metropolitan phases. All this gives a positive note to the settlement of the new world, after the horrors of the convict material. Yet oddly this original serial version has its final chapter set in Europe – Dawes/Devine has returned, together with Dorcas and Arthur; they have all made good in the Antipodes and now return 'home' to take over the family property in the old country. This is the traditional plot of the colonial novel. The serial may seem to give a happier version of the Antipodes than the book; yet it turns out to be ultimately Eurocentred in the way that the revised book version was not.

Between finishing the serial in 1872 and issuing the book in 1874 Clarke had moved even further from any idea of returning to England. But his commitment to Australia was one he expressed shrouded in that fearful gloom. What he essentially did in shaping the 370,000-word serial into a 200,000-word novel was to focus on the prison experience, and to exclude most of the material set in the free world. The central section of Dawes's convict life remained substantially unchanged. This was the strength of the serial. And after removing the trappings that the journalistic



exigencies of serialisation had entangled him in, Clarke was able to see what the proper shape and true concerns of his novel were. Prison provides pretty well the total world of the book version. Even though some of the convicts escape and their adventures provide a brief relief from the prison settlements, they are always recaptured and returned to the prison world, except for those who die.

Revising the serial was not an easy thing to do. Charles Gavan Duffy, the Irish nationalist politician who was at this time a member of the Victorian legislature and one of the trustees of the Public Library in Melbourne where Clarke was employed, records in his autobiography *My Life in Two Hemispheres*<sup>17</sup> how he was one of those who suggested to Clarke a course of revision. He argued that Devine's motivation for suppressing his true identity was inadequate in the serial and he suggested that 'the latter part of the story should be omitted.' Clarke replied, 'I confess that I feel a pang at your suggestions for vigorous cutting, but I am sure you are right, I will act upon your advice, and cut off the beginning and end of the book.' Clarke dedicated the book to Duffy.

Publication of the book version of the novel in 1874 did not mean that the serial was forgotten. It was re-run in the *Australian Journal* in September 1881 – January 1883, September 1886 – January 1888, and June 1913 – November 1915. In 1929 it appeared in book form, slightly abridged, and it appeared in its entirety edited by Stephen Murray-Smith in the Penguin English Library, Ringwood and Harmondsworth, 1970. There are numerous critical discussions of the two versions.<sup>18</sup>

*His Natural Life* is one of those novels that continually directs the reader back to the documentary reality on which it is based. And Clarke is at pains to remind the reader that the horrors he portrays indeed occurred. In the serial he documented various atrocities with footnotes. When he published the book version, he included a four-page appendix of his sources. But *His Natural Life* has been attacked for its unrepresentativeness, for its excessive dwelling on the unpleasant; not many critics repeat Arthur Patchett Martin's complaint that it drew attention to aspects of Australian history that should be left forgotten. But there are commentators like the historian L. L. Robson who argue that Clarke chose to show only the worst aspects of the convict system, and consequently gave a distorted picture of its history.<sup>19</sup> Clarke was, of course, deliberately dealing with an extreme case – the innocent Devine/Dawes suffering the worst of punishments; but the extreme case can reveal the true nature of the system. And Clarke was not unaware of the overall pattern of what

was happening. Chapter Two of Book Three of the original serial, 'Hobart Town in 1830' is a non-fictional account of the historical circumstances of the convict settlement in Hobart. It originally appeared between two chapters that are retained in the book version, 'The Topography of Van Diemen's Land' and 'The Solitary of Hell's Gates.' It is important in showing his awareness of the representative facts of convictism.<sup>20</sup>

*His Natural Life* is one of the great nineteenth-century novels. It was soon recognised as one of the classics of Australian literature, spreading beyond its first context as it appeared in English, American, Russian, German, Dutch, Swedish and Chinese editions, and as it went through numerous adaptations for stage, screen, television and graphic novel.<sup>21</sup>

Its account of the barbarity of the convict system is one aspect of its power; but convictism is extended as a metaphor for all human life. The convict world of the Antipodes serves to illuminate the nature of the free world of Britain; instead of Australia offering an idyllic utopia, it is used as a 'natural penitentiary' in which all the brutal systems of authority are used to restrict human potential. Freed from the traditional restraints of European society men do not blossom here into happy, innocent noble savages but are coerced and brutalised into wretches condemned to a senseless round of punishment. The horrors are substantiated enough, and their sources have been examined. But as important as the specific sources is the psychological patterning with which Clarke establishes Frere, Dawes and Rex. Frere and Devine/Dawes are cousins by family relationship, and 'frère' means 'brother' in French. Frere, pronounced free-er, is the free version of Dawes; the two of them embody the relationship of gaoler-convict, master-servant, authority and subject. Dawes and Rex embody the two opposed attitudes of the imprisoned: Dawes, innocent, plunges into deeper and deeper despair, and attempts suicide; Rex, the professional criminal, constantly uses his energy and ingenuity to break free. And the alternatives are stressed here by making Devine/Dawes and Rex half-brothers. As for Frere and Rex, they represent authority and rebellion, with Frere the sadistic officer and Rex the indomitable escapee; and the way his defiance makes him often as free as Frere is stressed by the role Sarah Purfoy plays as mistress to both of them. Similarly, of course, Frere and Dawes both love Sylvia, the blonde symbol of innocence who is contrasted with the raven-haired Sarah, image of sensuality. The various familial and blood relationships, together with some fortunate coincidences,

allow for an exploration of the psychological varieties of mankind's natural life in a way Fyodor Dostoevsky was to develop later in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80).

*His Natural Life* was undoubtedly Clarke's major achievement, but its overshadowing of his other work has been unfortunate. It has resulted in his being thought of as a novelist who produced only one good novel and who frittered away his talents in journalism – the charge Francis Adams made.<sup>22</sup> But Clarke was not simply or only a novelist. He wrote short stories and sketches, he wrote and translated and adapted plays, he was a poet, a critic of books and theatre, a columnist, a journalist, an editor, an historian and librarian. He was actively engaged in every aspect of literature – not least in the literary life of the Yorick Club, with such members as Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall, the Cave of Adullam, and the Café de Paris.<sup>23</sup> Frank Myers, Charles Bright, A. H. Massina and V. J. Daley all recall anecdotes of Clarke living the literary and Bohemian life.<sup>24</sup> His work and his writing and his life were as one. It is as one of Australia's first and greatest men of letters that he is most accurately described.

Although Clarke wrote over forty short stories and sketches, he published only two collections of them in his lifetime, *Holiday Peak and Other Tales* (George Robertson, Melbourne, 1873) and *Four Stories High* (A. H. Massina, Melbourne, 1877). A third volume, *The Mystery of Major Molineux and Human Repetends*, was published two months after his death (Cameron, Laing & Co, Melbourne, 1881). Hamilton Mackinnon, Clarke's literary executor, published both collected and uncollected stories in *The Marcus Clarke Memorial Volume* (Cameron, Laing & Co, Melbourne, 1884), *Sensational Tales* (M'Carron, Bird & Co, Melbourne, 1886), and *The Austral Edition of the Selected Works of Marcus Clarke* (Fergusson and Mitchell, Melbourne, 1890). The *Austral Edition* offers the fullest selection, and Mackinnon grouped them in two parts, 'Australian Tales and Sketches' and 'Stories Imaginative and Fanciful'. 'Australian Tales and Sketches' was reissued in a separate volume as *Australian Tales* (A. W. Bruce, Melbourne, 1896) and as *Australian Tales of the Bush*, (George Robertson, Melbourne, 1897). 'Australian Tales and Sketches' and 'Stories Imaginative and Fanciful' were reissued jointly as *Stories* by Marcus Clarke (Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1983).

The stories can be grouped into three basic categories. There are his realistic sketches and stories of Australian up-country life; there are his formula magazine stories – melodramatic, plotted, sensational; and there are his experimental,

metaphysical and fantasy stories. The most famous of his stories was 'Pretty Dick', the account of a child who strays into the bush and dies before the search party finds him. It was a popular subject for literary and pictorial treatment, and drew, of course, on harsh realities. 'Pretty Dick' was much admired by many readers and critics. H. G. Turner found it 'the most perfect little idyll he ever wrote, and distinguished from anything else by its refined pathos and almost reverential delicacy of treatment.' 'A beautifully told story,' Arthur Patchett Martin wrote, one that 'stands out among its author's writings as a piece of pure pathos, and an exceptional tale whose attraction is owing neither to its ghastly horrors nor to its flippant wit' – the former characterising *His Natural Life* and the latter Clarke's journalism. And Hamilton Mackinnon records how the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes found it 'a *very* touching story, very well told.' However, it provoked the scorn and contempt of Francis Adams, A. G. Stephens and Vance Palmer for what they saw as artificial and calculated sentimentality.<sup>25</sup>

When the story first appeared in the *Colonial Monthly* Pretty Dick was said to be aged twelve. But the reviewer in the *Argus*, 2 April 1869, remarked that Clarke

seems to have made a mistake in fixing the age of Pretty Dick at twelve years. Bush lads of that mature age are generally strapping fellows, who do not easily get lost, and are more likely to wander in the direction of the public house than to sentimentalise upon the margin of mysterious swamps, or scale mountains in search of the picturesque and beautiful. The boy should have been six instead of twelve; and then the frequent mention of his poor little hands, and his little shoes, would have been less incongruous. But the narrative is an excellent one for all that and is written in a style which the author could do well to cultivate.

Clarke changed the child's age to seven for book publication. He did not, however, follow the *Argus* reviewer's advice about further cultivating the style of 'Pretty Dick.' 'An Up-Country Township' published the next year is written in a much less literary idiom – and one that could accommodate the colloquialisms of such Australian characters as 'Wallaby Dick'. Clarke has moved from the stance of the remote, pastoralising literary intellectual, to using a style that can incorporate the realities of up-country idioms in his narrative. He does not, however, write the whole sketch in the idiom of Wallaby Dick; he was on the way to the achievement of Henry Lawson, but stopped short. Yet he does capture the low-keyed, wry, dry, ironic, characteristically Australian manner.

In March 1871 Clarke reviewed Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp* for the *Australasian*.<sup>26</sup> Clarke had read and admired many of the American writers: Melville, Twain, Whitman, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Emerson, Washington Irving and Fennimore Cooper are all mentioned by him in his writings. The Americans provided Clarke with the precedents for the establishment of a new and vital literature. In one of his 'Noah's Ark' columns in the *Australasian*, 25 May 1872, he discusses American literature and he has the American Kyfax say:

You persistently refuse to understand the literature of democracy. We are tired of *formulae*, we demand something which is to be expressive of the life of the century – with its steam-engines, and divorce courts, and gold mines, and revolving pistols, and social science, and electric telegraphs, and spiritualists, and freethinkers, and –

Harte especially excited Clarke because here was a writer successfully doing in America what Clarke had been advocating for Australia – creating a new literature for a new country.

Any old Australian can call to mind stories as pathetic as 'The Luck of Roaring Camp', or 'Tennessee's Partner', but it never occurred to him that any wholesome lesson might be told in such stories, or that such stories would be worth the writing.

The influence of Harte is apparent in Clarke's story 'Poor Jo' which first appeared in the *Australasian* the month after Clarke had reviewed *The Luck of Roaring Camp*. This tear-jerking melodrama of the dumb, mental-defective Jo, who lays down his own life to save the lives of the young lady he adores, and her lover, from a flood, captures Harte's combination of tragic self-sacrifice, of dumb devotion, of a great spirit in a deformed earthly body that can find no socially conventional way to express itself. H. G. Turner remarked that a number of these sketches of Clarke's were 'as completely illustrative of the daily dreary dullness of a small mining community, or decaying bush hamlet, as are the graphic pictures of Bret Harte when describing the haunts of the Californian miner.'<sup>27</sup> In the sketches Clarke was spared the necessities of plot. When he more closely followed Harte in 'Poor Jo' the requirements of plot took him into the realms of melodrama. And many of his other stories are routinely nineteenth-century melodramatic exercises.

'La Béguine' tells how Marston, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, encounters a nineteen-year-old girl who has just been abandoned by her wealthy lover. Marston

and the girl go off to Paris and spend all the money the lover has left the girl; then Marston returns to school. There is the potential for melodrama here, but Clarke avoids the sensational by giving a delicate sketch rather than a fully rounded narrative.<sup>28</sup> 'La Béguine' is one of a group of stories he wrote towards the end of 1872 and in early 1873 in which he looks back on the circumstances of his emigration to Australia. 'La Béguine', 'Holiday Peak' and 'Human Repetends' all exploit the autobiographical motifs of an adolescence in the house of a widowed father who, with an easy-going Bohemian tolerance, let his son do whatever he liked. In much of Clarke's writing there is a sense of resentment at his father's easygoing carelessness, at the lack of concern for his son's moral welfare. But the extent to which these are actual autobiography is a question that needs to be treated with caution. The obvious fantasy elements of 'Holiday Peak' and 'Human Repetends' should alert us to the possibility that the autobiographical motifs may equally be fantasy; yet, since the motifs recur, it might be that they are accounts based on reality put into a context of fantasy for their concealment.

'Holiday Peak' and 'Human Repetends' illustrate that important fantasy strain in Clarke's writing. In 'Holiday Peak' it is a somewhat whimsical fantasy of 'make-believe'. In 'Human Repetends', though, there is a far more serious experimentation with time, and the theme of what Thomas De Quincey called 'unutterable and self-repeating infinities'. This genre was especially cultivated in the twentieth century, from G. K. Chesterton to a number of Latin American writers: Jorge Luis Borges's 'Theme of the Traitor and Hero'<sup>29</sup> is a memorable version of it, as, appropriately, unending versions of it crop up in different centuries on different continents.

Critical orthodoxy had it that the Australian short story began with Henry Lawson and deals with stoic or comic figures in an outback landscape. But there has always been much more variety than critical orthodoxy allows; and Clarke's Bullocktown stories demonstrate how Lawson had his predecessor in opening up the up-country for literary cultivation; and that the conventional magazine formula story and the experimental metaphysical fantasy provided two further important achievements in Australian writing that the critics and historians have neglected.

In September 1873 Clarke was promoted to sub-Librarian of the Melbourne Public Library, from the position of clerk (later renamed secretary) to the trustees of the library that he had held since June 1870. In November he was in dispute with the *Argus* management, which was boycotting reporting the Melbourne Cup because

there were no free press tickets. Clarke covered the meeting for the rival Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald* – allegedly by use of a camera obscura. It was a jolly jape, but it brought to an end his five years' association with the *Argus* and *Australasian*. But he had been moving away politically from that representative of the landed, conservative squattocracy. The experience of researching and writing *Old Tales* and *His Natural Life* had radicalised him. His impending bankruptcy, that finally occurred in July 1874, embittered him. Towards the end of his life 'his radicalism was very red', H. G. Turner remarked.<sup>30</sup> His series of twelve articles, 'The Wicked World', in the *Weekly Times*, 17 January – 14 April 1874, was a splendid Balzacian survey of Melbourne bourgeois life – the bankers, doctors, lawyers, journalists revealed in all their acquisitiveness, pretentiousness and sexual dishonesties. The whole series is reprinted along with a huge range of Clarke's other journalism in L. T. Hergenhan, ed., *A Colonial City: High and Low Life. Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1972.

After the extraordinarily prolific output of the years 1869 to 1874, Clarke's later years look thin in comparison. But this is only in comparison: he was still amazingly productive. From September 1874 to March 1875 he serialised a novel *Chidiack Tichborne, or the Babington Conspiracy* in the *Australian Journal*, an historical romp about a plot to put Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne and to remove Elizabeth. In 1875 he published the novel *'Twixt Shadow and Shine*, and after that he began work on his fifth novel, 'Felix and Felicitas', but this he never completed. He was still writing and adapting for the theatre. But one of his major concerns now as ever was the sustained review and essay, the considered piece of what the Victorians called 'the higher journalism.' His range was wide. He wrote readily about English, American, European and Australian literary and intellectual topics. He showed neither a narrow nationalism that rejected anything from the world outside Australia, nor a mandarin Europhile arrogance that considered anything in the colonies as beneath notice. One of the great internationalists in Australian writing, he drew on an acquaintance with a world-wide literary culture, and it was with his knowledge of that culture that he was consciously pioneering an Australian literature, ensuring that it drew on this international heritage, and established itself in that context. In his introduction to the re-issue of his friend Adam Lindsay Gordon's poems, his comments on the beginnings of an Australian school of poetry are a milestone in the development of Australian literary criticism. Critic after critic

refers back to this proclamation that Australian writing had now come of age, now existed as a distinct entity.<sup>31</sup> The preface is memorable, too, for its classic portrayal of the compelling gloom, the luring despair of the Australian bush. Clarke was incorporating here material he had originally published in texts he had written to go along with the monthly series *Photographs of the Pictures in the National Gallery, Melbourne* in 1874. The descriptions he incorporates were originally applied to Nicholas Chevalier's painting 'The Buffalo Ranges, Victoria' and to Louis Buvelôt's 'Waterpool near Coleraine'.<sup>32</sup>

The essay 'Civilisation Without Delusion' in the first issue of the *Victorian Review*, November 1879, was another exercise in the higher journalism.<sup>33</sup> Here Clarke was participating in that international debate, questioning the validity of the Christian doctrine of revealed religion, miracles, hell fire, and eternal life, and arguing that Christianity was no longer a relevant creed. The *Victorian Review* published a reply by the Bishop of Melbourne, Dr James Moorhouse, the following month, but refused to run Clarke's reply to Moorhouse. The *Melbourne Review* published Clarke's reply in their January 1880 issue, and then withdrew all copies from sale almost at once. The whole controversy was collected in book form as *Civilisation Without Delusion* (F. F. Baillière, Melbourne, 1880) and sold rapidly. It is an important indication of Clarke's sceptical attitude towards religion, no secret to those who knew him or read his work, and it provides some interesting amplification of the attitudes he expresses fictionally in the two clergymen in *His Natural Life*, Rev Meekin and Rev North.<sup>34</sup> But the controversy made Clarke no friends in the Melbourne establishment.

When in 1880 he was involved in the adaptation for the Melbourne political scene of Gilbert à Beckett's satirical play *The Happy Land*, he created even more offence. The premier prohibited its performance – and the *Argus* and the *Age* immediately printed the full text, 17 January 1880. Clarke's part in the writing was no secret. So that when he applied for the position of Librarian for the Public Library in 1881 he had good reason to expect some hostile reaction. But in financial difficulties again he had borrowed money on the strength of being appointed. He was indeed one of the three short-listed candidates, but that was all. The moneylender pressed for payment. Clarke went bankrupt a second time. In the midst of this stress he fell sick with pleurisy. Within a week he was dead. Hamilton Mackinnon records in the biography to the *Austral Edition* how Clarke was making writing motions until the end. 'Losing his speech he beckoned for pencil and paper, and, seizing hold of the



sheets, moved his hand over them as if writing. Shortly afterwards the mind began to wander, but still the hand continued moving with increasing velocity, and every now and then a futile attempt to speak was made.' He died at St Kilda on 2 August 1881, aged thirty-five. He left a wife and six children, the eldest only eleven.

Introduction to *Marcus Clarke*, ed. Michael Wilding, *Portable Australian Authors*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1976; reprinted, *Australian Authors Series*, 1988.

## Henry Kendall's Recovery at Brisbane Water

When the thirty-four-year-old Henry Kendall arrived in Gosford in late 1873 his life was in ruins. Four years earlier in 1869 he had given up his job in the New South Wales state government office in Sydney and moved to Melbourne where he hoped to live by his writing. He wrote for a range of papers and magazines but his earnings were never enough to support himself, wife and child. He sank into poverty, plunged into alcoholism. His one-year-old daughter, Araluen, died in February 1870.<sup>1</sup> In October he returned to Sydney, his son Frederick was born, and he and his wife separated. Arrested for forging a cheque for £1, he escaped gaol only by being deemed insane. Set at liberty, six months later he was committed to Gladesville asylum. The admission sheet recorded 'His habits are intemperate and he frequently takes opium and sedatives in large quantities ... He is said to have been violent and to have threatened suicide during the present attack ...' He was in Gladesville asylum for three weeks from the 5th to 29th July 1871. In 1873 he was committed again, this time staying for two months, and discharged on 7 July.<sup>2</sup>

Friends then arranged employment for Kendall away from Sydney. His first biographer, Alexander Sutherland, records: 'Kendall received the appointment of a newspaper at Grafton, a town where he was well known and valued. The steamer he sailed in called for a few hours at Newcastle by the way. Kendall was one of the passengers who went ashore, but not one of those who returned on board.'<sup>3</sup> Having drunk away what funds he had, he is then said to have begun to walk back to Sydney. There are no known surviving records of this episode. It would have been a considerable walk, and it may be that Kendall disembarked in Gosford where, in October or November 1873 he met Charles Fagan in Campbell's Hotel.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Fagan, aged 41, was the eldest of the seven sons of Peter Fagan. Peter had been transported from Ireland in 1820, aged 27. After the expiration of his sentence, he took up land in Brisbane Water and eventually developed the family timber business. According to Bishop Reed, Kendall was befriended by Peter's sons William and Joseph, taken into the Fagan household and nursed back to recovery.<sup>5</sup>

The Fagans' cottage, minus some of its outbuildings, still stands and is preserved as the Henry Kendall Cottage and Historical Museum at 25 Henry Kendall Street, West Gosford.<sup>6</sup> In 1840 the Red Cow Inn had been established there but, perhaps fortunately, it was no longer licensed by the time Kendall arrived. In *The Fagans, the Cottage, and Kendall* Joan Fenton notes: 'in the little room which the poet Henry Kendall occupied may be seen the colonial sofa on which he slept and on which he carved his initials.'<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Fagan recalled in 1931, 'He used to write down there in the glen, always in the early morning and after sunset. At other times he gave us a hand on the farm, and – well, he was just like one of us boys in the family'.<sup>8</sup> Joseph recalled further:

After tea in the evenings when Kendall would light his pipe it was a treat and an education to listen to him. There did not seem to be a subject under the sun of which he was not master. It made one think of the words of Oliver Goldsmith, 'And still the wonder grew that one small head could carry all he knew.' In the days when Kendall knew the glen it was a beautiful spot, but later the woodcutter found it and came and laid it waste. Immense trees were cut down, blocking the pretty water-course and it made him sad to see the havoc wrought by careless vandalism.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that Peter Fagan senior knew of Henry as a writer, which might explain how the family readily took him in. Joseph recalled: 'Chance had introduced them. Kendall was writing in Melbourne, not having too good a time ... My father had spoken to me of him. Later we got him up here to live with us ... My father used to do a bit of writing too.' Peter is unlikely to have seen the Melbourne papers, but he could have known of Kendall from the *Freeman's Journal*, the Roman Catholic weekly modelled on the Irish magazine of the same name, established in Sydney in 1850, which had a strongly Irish flavour.<sup>10</sup> Peter Fagan was born in Ireland, Kendall's mother was of Irish descent. Kendall had begun contributing to *Freeman's Journal* in September 1871 with an eleven-part series 'The Harp of Erin' about Irish writers. He contributed to it regularly until April 1872, after which he sank into what he called 'the shadow of 1872.' Tradition has it that when the house was cleared, stacks of *Freeman's Journal* are said to have lined the walls.<sup>11</sup>

In Melbourne Kendall had been a friend of the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, who shot himself in 1870, unable to pay the printer for his last book of poems. Kendall's first biographer, Alexander Sutherland, claimed that Kendall 'had no pleasure in horses, and loathed what he considered the idiotic frenzy of the race-course. He and

Lindsay Gordon could never grow intimate by reason of a community of taste.<sup>12</sup> But the Fagans were as heavily into horses as the champion steeplechase rider Gordon. As the plaque on the wall of their cottage records, “The Fagans were keen racing men and bred champion horses, one being the bay mare “Mabel”, winner of the Lord Mayor’s Cup at Randwick, Sydney, 1879.”<sup>13</sup>

It would be nice to say that the Fagans changed Kendall’s attitude to horses – but it is unlikely that Kendall could have spent much time with Gordon, whose life from his schooldays had been involved with horses, if he had been as dismissive as Sutherland claims. And the year before he arrived in Gosford Kendall had written an enthusiastic appreciation of a horse race in Marcus Clarke’s novel *Long Odds*, remarking “That bit about the finish is capital.”<sup>14</sup>

But undoubtedly Kendall was restored to physical health while with the Fagans and undoubtedly he spent a fair amount of time on horseback, something he could not have afforded to do in Melbourne. In the *Illustrated Sydney News*, 25 October 1890, A. G. Wise gives Charles Fagan’s recollections:

Book in hand, said Mr Fagan, he wandered for hours here and in the gullies. He was an unskilful rider, being, like Carlyle, too often absorbed in reveries, and preferred walking. He was not, as a biographer has stated, employed to carry the mails between Gosford and Kincumber. My brother had the mail contract, and sometimes, for the sake of a change, Kendall used to jump on a horse and ride to Kincumber, about nine miles away. The road is very pretty to Green Point, and thence across country to Broadwater Lagoon. He wrote his poems on any scrap of paper or old note-book, jotting down odd lines and words, to write the poem as a whole with scarcely an alteration. He always wrote with his left hand, owing to an accident in his youth, forming each letter separately.<sup>15</sup>

Joseph Fagan had the mail run, a two-day trip into Sydney and back. He recalled that ‘Harry sometimes would come along part of the way, always up the mountain to his favourite spot at the head of the glen, and there would often spend the whole day by the waterfalls or in the darkened fern-grown recesses, coming back to the farm when night fell, while I went on my way.’<sup>16</sup> He was more positive than Charles about Kendall’s horsemanship, writing to Kendall’s eldest son Frederick: ‘He could ride a horse well and would be up with the best of us when yarding a fractious mob of cattle, and was a good judge of a horse, and knew the pedigree of every horse racing at Randwick.’<sup>17</sup> It was presumably in this context that Kendall wrote his

popular racing poems 'Kingsborough' and 'How the Melbourne Cup was Won'.<sup>18</sup>

Kendall's twin brother Basil died in Sydney of tuberculosis, 21 January 1874. As far as the rest of Kendall's family were concerned – his wife, his mother, his sisters – Henry had disappeared and he kept his whereabouts secret. But he was in touch with his literary contacts. The poet Philip Holdsworth, visiting relatives at Brisbane Water around the middle of 1874, encountered Kendall and they began to correspond. Kendall was determined to distance his Bohemian past. He wrote to Holdsworth, 4 September 1874: 'I haven't a scrap left of my Bohemian writings.'<sup>19</sup>

The writer and journalist J. Sheridan Moore, who had helped Kendall publish his first book, *Poems and Songs* in 1862, also resumed correspondence. 23 October 1874 Kendall wrote to him: 'I have taken nothing stronger than tea for the last twelve months.' He then crossed out twelve and wrote eleven and continued: 'Nothing shall tempt me to write for money again; and the life I have chosen precludes me from writing for pleasure.'<sup>20</sup>

He repeated this rejection of literature frequently in his letters at this time.<sup>21</sup> But it was with literary friends that he resumed correspondence in mid-1874. His detailed critique of a poem Holdsworth had sent him pulled no punches. 'If I did not know you, I should take you to be an intellectual eunuch,' he told him, 19 June 1874. 'If I don't suit you, why – hang it – get another butcher.'<sup>22</sup> The lengthy appraisal and suggested revisions he offered indicate his serious involvement in the business of poetry.

This was something he nonetheless denied. 19 November 1874 he wrote to Moore:

You are mistaken when you say that my resolution not to enter the domain of letters again is an offshoot of the 'egotism of despair.' It is no such thing; but is, most probably, the issue of laziness. The fact is I hate the sight of a pen. I may, from time to time scribble off a squib or prose trifle; but, as to more serious work – bah! I had quite enough of it during the weary years between 1869 and 74. Still, I will always sympathise with movements on behalf of Australian Literature – with your efforts, especially ... Why should I bother and work out my brains for a shadow? Did Harpur acquire a reputation by his writings? Did Michael and Gordon, with all their belief in themselves? If they failed what right have I to expect success? And what, after all, is success of the kind worth? Nothing. Give me the bovine life and let the Gods go hang!<sup>23</sup>

And he similarly wrote to Thomas Butler, the editor of *The Freeman's Journal*, 20 March 1875: 'I would rather turn bullock driver than go back to the ragged old Bohemian life.'<sup>24</sup>

He was also in touch with Margaretta Stenhouse, the widow of Nicol Stenhouse, the Balmain lawyer and bibliophile and one time friend of Thomas De Quincey, to whose literary circle Sheridan Moore had introduced Kendall.<sup>25</sup> At her request in August 1874 he wrote an 'In Memoriam' for her daughter Alice, sending a revised version incorporating some of her suggestions, 9 September. It was published in the *Town and Country Journal*, 12 September 1874. Mrs Stenhouse gave him a copy of the Bible. Kendall wrote to Moore, 19 November 1874:

Mrs Stenhouse has just presented me with a Bible. Poor lady – she wants me to swallow the dogma asserting its plenary inspiration. I cannot see it. Setting aside the grand poetry of the 'prophets', the magnificent myth of Elijah, the fine oriental wisdom of the Proverbs, and the sublime code of ethics laid down in the Gospels, it is about the most disappointing book I have ever read.

Nonetheless he seems to have read it carefully; annotated by Kendall, it is preserved in the National Library of Australia (NLA MS 2189).<sup>26</sup> Possibly he was provoking Moore who for a while had been a Benedictine monk and headmaster of Lyndhurst College in Glebe, leaving the order in 1856 and marrying in 1857.

Kendall's repeated protestations that he was finished with the literary life were not true. He had begun writing again – indeed, he may never have stopped. Michael Ackland suggests that Kendall was contributing prose paragraphs to the 'Sydney Town Talk' feature of the *Town and Country Journal* through 1873 and 1874, and offers some tentative identifications of these anonymous pieces.<sup>27</sup> Kendall's first known poem to appear in the *Journal*, on 25 April 1874, was 'Rover', a long and gentle tribute to 'one-eyed Rover. A grave old dog, with tattered ears.' The setting is unspecific, but it is certainly not urban; he has left that world. It could well be the Fagans' household, with its guns, dogs, horses, cat and kittens, cattle, and forest prowlers. It is probably the first of his poems written there, six months after his arrival in Gosford.<sup>28</sup>

'The Song of the Shingle Splitters', followed in the *Town and Country Journal* on 2 May.

In the dark wild woods, where the lone owl broods  
And the dingoes nightly yell –  
Where the curlew's cry goes floating by,  
We splitters of shingles dwell.

Significantly it shows Kendall drawing on the materials of his current life in the

Fagans' timber business. The Fagans' cottage is still roofed with shingles, and some of the original shingles are still in place. The poem is a mark of respect for the world of hard, manual labour, so different from the upper-middle class milieu of Marcus Clarke, Adam Lindsay Gordon and the Yorick Club that Kendall had known in Melbourne.<sup>29</sup>

He went on to write other tributes to manual workers – 'Bill the Bullock Driver' published in the *Town and Country Journal*, 1 January 1876, and 'Jim the Splitter' in *Freeman's Journal*, 21 February 1880, which he collected in his last book, *Songs from the Mountains* (1880) together with two further bush portraits, 'Bob' and 'Billy Vickers.' These have a more sardonic view of bush characters in all their contradictions, perhaps as a result of dealing with them later on a daily basis at the Fagans' Camden Haven branch. As he wrote to N. Walter Swan, 16 October 1880, 'My duty is to look after from 100 to 150 sawyers and splitters – great roughs with huge faithless faces, in whose eyes I am a rogue and *blank* dog, as all employers are ...'<sup>30</sup> 'Song of the Shingle-Splitters' was not collected in *Songs from the Mountains*.

The isolation of the splitters in the dark woods has an obvious parallel with Kendall's own emotional and psychological situation. Their distance from urban temptations is something he now shares with them: 'away from din, and sorrow and sin / Where troubles but rarely come.' And Kendall's assertion that 'Our food is rough, but we have enough; / Our drink is better than wine' may indicate a new attempt at programming abstemiousness. Something that was not yet present in 'Rover' where, the poet recorded, 'I sip my nightly grog.'

4 July 1874 he published 'The Voice in the Wild Oak' in the *Town and Country Journal*. The title is annotated 'Written in the shadow of 1872', the year of homelessness and alcoholism before he came to Gosford. It begins with regrets for 'twelve wasted years':

But I, who am that perished soul  
Have wasted so these powers of mine,  
That I can never write that whole,  
Pure, perfect speech of thine.

The song of the wild oak 'when high thunder smites the hill / And hunts the wild dog to his den' is a song that Kendall celebrates:

Thy cries, like maledictions, shrill

And shriek from glen to glen,  
As if a frightful memory whipped  
Thy soul for some infernal crime.

The admission report for Kendall at Gladesville asylum noted: 'He imagines that he was accused of murdering a child.'<sup>31</sup> The death of his daughter Araluen in Melbourne in 1870 haunted him with feelings of guilty responsibility. He wrote to Holdsworth, 14 July 1874: 'As regards the tone of the *Native Oak*, I cannot help it. *You* know something of my personal history ... As to my complaints about the waning of power, I have good reason to make them. The old Passion is past kindling now.'<sup>32</sup> The poem provoked a couple of poetic responses in the *Journal* from Charlton Park and Sheridan Moore.<sup>33</sup>

The sadness and guilt and despair his poems expressed were deep-seated. But the physical environment began to work a healing process. 'Arcadia at our Gates', a two-part prose article published in the *Town and Country Journal*, 27 February and 6 March 1875, was an enthusiastic, glowing account of the beauties of the Gosford region, unknown to most people:

About six miles to the west or southwest of Narrara lies the darkly magnificent valley of Mooni Mooni. Shut in by immense beetling hills from half the morning, hiding an April in the hottest days of December, and cooling the eye with a blessing of brooks when the tops of the ridges are dead for want of rain, this beautiful Goshen is still left to those primitive types, the sawyer and shingle-splitter – and to a few of these only.

And he goes on to celebrate

the bold promontory of Barrenjoey ... the magnificent opening of Pittwater ... the gleaming crescent of sand known as Ettalong beach ... the quiet hill-folded waters of Woy Woy, from whose margins the ridges run back in magnificent buttresses towards the 'lone home of the echoes', Mooni Creek ...

It is an account not without its horror. The massacre of the original indigenous inhabitants is not glossed over: 'the military displayed great barbarity. In the middle of the night, camp after camp was surprised, and the occupants, men, women and children, shot down, like native dogs. The poor friendly blacks fared no better than the others; and the whole affair was a horrible satire upon our civilisation.'<sup>34</sup>

Kendall seems to have found peace in this Central Coast Arcadia. And he was anxious not to have it disturbed. 19 May 1875 he wrote to Sheridan Moore:



I write to you chiefly to beg that you will not divulge my whereabouts to any one of my relatives. I don't want to have anything to do with either the Rutter or the Kendall mob. I am as tired of one family as I am of the other.

I have to thank you for your kind effort to obtain literary work for me; and to say that such kindness is only natural to you. But I do not need employment of that kind – I can do without it. Literature has been so long my crutch that I don't think I shall ever use it as a walking stick. If my relatives leave me alone, things will run smoothly enough. When I saw you last, I had for the first time during the last nineteen months taken a glass or two too much. Since then I have not touched anything stronger than water.<sup>35</sup>

Other poems evoking Kendall's Central Coast environment in 1874–75 were not published until after he had left the district. Possibly they were written after Kendall went to work as accountant and paymaster for the new branch of the Fagans' timber business in Camden Haven in July 1875. 'Mooni', published in the *Town and Country Journal*, 11 December 1875, opens with a cheerful note, recalling Robert Browning's 'Oh, to be in England now that April's there', from 'Home Thoughts From Abroad'. But it carries the superscription 'written in the shadow of 1872' and soon turns to a dark menace:

Ah, to be by Mooni now!  
Where the great dark hills of wonder,  
Scarred with storm and cleft asunder  
By the strong sword of the thunder,  
Make a night on morning's brow!

The shadow of 1872 is there in the regrets he expresses for the past when 'the life of inspiration / Like a god's transfiguration, / Was the shining change in me', the time before his creative energies had been wasted away. It is, as A.C.W. Mitchell writes, 'his lament for lost innocence, his nostalgia for the days when he was "the shining sharer / Of that larger life, and rarer / Beauty."<sup>36</sup> But Mooni offers hope and regeneration:

Still to be by Mooni cool –  
Where the water-blossoms glister ...  
  
Just to rest beyond the burning  
Outer world – its sneers and spurning –  
Ah! my heart – my heart is yearning  
Still to be by Mooni cool.

One of the most famous of Kendall's poems relating to his Gosford period, 'Names Upon a Stone' appeared in the *Town and Country Journal*, 2 March 1878, 'inscribed to G. L. Fagan Esq.'

I see the river of my dream  
Four wasted years ago.  
Narrara of the waterfalls,  
The darling of the hills,  
Whose home is under mountain walls  
By many-luted rills!  
Her bright green nooks and channels cool  
I never more may see;  
But, ah! the Past was beautiful –  
The sights that used to be.

On Christmas Day 1874 the Fagan brothers had walked with Kendall up the valley and sat by 'the rock pool in the glen.' Before leaving they chipped their initials on the stone. The carved initials are still visible to this day.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Fagan recalled the episode in 1931 on the occasion of the unveiling of the stone pillar beside the old Pacific Highway (now the Central Coast Highway) on which a verse of the poem is inscribed:

There was a rock-pool in a glen  
Beyond Narrara's sands;  
The mountains shut it in from men  
In flowerful fairy lands;  
But once we found its dwelling place –  
The lovely and the lone –  
And, in a dream, I stooped to trace  
Our names upon a stone.

It is one of his most successful poems. As A. D. Hope remarked of it, 'Kendall should receive due credit, I think for having won his way through to this refreshing simplicity, from the lush, rather gushing romantic baroque lyric style with which he started.'<sup>38</sup>

The celebration of natural beauty, the waterfall, the rock-pool, the moss evoke a light, delicate scene. But beneath it is the sadder note, the lament for Peter Fagan senior who had died in 1876:

A beauty like the light of song  
Is in my dreams, that show  
The grand old man who lived so long  
As spotless as the snow.

A fitting garland for the dead  
I cannot compass yet;  
But many things he did and said  
I never will forget.

A month after publishing 'Names Upon a Stone', Kendall drew on his memories of the central coast again for a prose account of a trip 'Overland from Gosford to Sydney' published in the *Town and Country Journal* under the pseudonym 'Tiresias', 28 April 1878.<sup>39</sup> Suitably prepared with 'prime Jamaica' rum, the anonymous narrator sets out 'contented – ay, even happy. Those rugged Mooni Hills lying back there to the south and west of the Gosford waters never echoed more jolly songs than mine were on that eventful night.' But having drained his flask, he finds 'the "mere dip in the hills"' transformed into 'what appeared to be a yawning Gehenna ... Into the abyss I went, down, down, a "thousand fathoms down" ... At last we reached the bottom, and went, headfirst, into a great creek ...'

At this point he encounters a certain Billy Burton, and they drain the bottle of rum the narrator was entrusted to deliver to Bloffins. 'I went along singing gaily – a very king of the forest ... and hence we threaded the long Mooni ravine without tumbling into its dumb, deep waters. At last we came to the ford facing the wall of hill known as "Dublin Jack's"' and he 'slithered' off the horse's back.

How the dreary thirteen miles between Dublin Jack's and Peat's Ferry were got over, it is beyond my power to tell. Towards morning the moon arose on a landscape cloaked in wet gleaming mist – a deep decided vapour which every now and then, I took to be the Hawkesbury ... I staggered along the stony peninsula which divides the fine gloom of the deep-seated Mooni waters from the bright liberal lustre shed out by the parent stream.

And then he bumps into Bloffins who 'quickly led me to his comfortable little home, and seated me in front of a two gallon keg. What more could a reasonable man desire? I stayed a week in that beautifully situated cottage back there by the junction of the Mooni and the Hawkesbury ...'

It is a comic piece and the events may or may not be true. But in it Kendall pays tribute to the district he had lived in and recovered in. 'I cannot help mentioning the magnificent scenery of the Hawkesbury Islands and that of the Mooni Valley. The latter has all the effects produced by contrast and combination – it is at once one of the grandest and most beautiful spectacles in Australia.' And he concludes

with a blatant plea on behalf of the Fagans' mail run – under threat by the proposal to carry the mails by sea.

The celebration of alcoholic excess in this piece is in contradiction to his frequent insistence in his letters on his sobriety while recovering at Gosford. But restored to health and reunited with his family at Camden Haven (renamed Kendall in 1891), he had the occasional drink. In *Henry Kendall: His Later Years* Frederick Kendall recalled this period:

I remember the wine shop, conducted by a Mrs Logan and her two daughters, where from a stock of 'Colonial wines' they catered for the indiscriminating palates of local rustics. When my father in one of his darker moods would adjourn to this resort it was only after the remonstrances and pleadings of his wife had failed to restrain him ... Such spasms were, however, not frequent. They would be followed by perhaps excited talk, then sleep and an ashamed awakening.

A small room of the Logans' wine shop was used as a post office between 1876 and 1881. The post office was closed on 1 January 1881 after a request from Henry Kendall, who objected to the wine shanty being part of the building from which it operated. The 2012 Kendall Community Centre brochure *Kendall* records that Henry 'used his penmanship to write to the Post Master General lending support to the villagers' request for a post office'. The post office then found a home in the Fagans' new general store, with Michael Fagan as postmaster. Fagan received £5 per annum as postmaster and £79 per annum for operating the mail pick-up and delivery service for the Camden Haven area. Kendall's intervention probably has more to do with helping the Fagans to get the mail contract than with any abstemious objection to the post office being in the wine shop. On the day the post office left the wine shop, Kendall himself moved to Cundletown to prepare to take up the position of Inspector of State Forests, arranged for him by Henry Parkes, a position for which his work in the Fagans' timber business had qualified him.<sup>40</sup>

Kendall's drinking was not something of which the Fagans were unaware. A. G. Stephens recorded in his *Bulletin* diary, 20 May 1896:

Holdsworth told several Kendall anecdotes: Once Holdsworth called to see Kendall at house of P. F. Fagan in Sydney (whose name appears in inscription to Kendall's collected poems, George Robertson & Co., 1886). Found him in charge of servant – practical prisoner. Kendall wanted 1/-. Holdsworth gave him 2/6. Kendall eluded servant, Holdsworth followed him to three pubs – a

drink in each – brought him home ‘absolutely flaccid.’

Again, at Camden Haven, N.S.W. – riding party. Kendall went forward on some errand – two or three miles further on Fagan stopped party (which included Mrs Kendall): ‘I’ll go forward and shift that log out of the way.’ The log was Kendall, who had imbibed freely of roadside rum.<sup>41</sup>

The month after ‘Overland from Gosford to Sydney’ appeared, Kendall published ‘Narrara Creek’ in *Sydney Once a Week*, 18 May 1878. It was a creek he had known well. Joseph Fagan wrote to Frederick Kendall in the 1920s: ‘He would not wait for two minutes for the boat that was on the opposite side of Narrara Creek, Gosford, when he wanted to cross. You would hear a dive in and the boat would soon be over. He was a good swimmer.’<sup>42</sup>

Narrara! grand son of the haughty hill torrent,  
Too late in my day have I looked at thy current –  
Too late in my life to discern and inherit  
The soul of thy beauty, the joy of thy spirit!

The poem expresses his regrets at the way his life has turned out.

What life the gods gave me – what largess I tasted –  
The youth thrown away, and the faculties wasted,  
I might, as thou seest, have stood in high places,  
Instead of in pits where the brand of disgrace is,  
A byword for scoffers ...

The force and splendour of the rushing water, the energy and drive serve as a huge contrast with Kendall’s own depleted energies:

But the face of thy river – the torrented power  
That smites at the rock while it fosters the flower –  
Shall gleam in my dreams with the summer-look splendid,  
And the beauty of woodlands and waterfalls blended;  
And often I’ll think of far-forested noises,  
And the emphasis deep of grand sea-going voices,  
And turn to Narrara the eyes of a lover,  
When the sorrowful days of my singing are over.

There is some suggestion that the poem may have been written in 1874.<sup>43</sup> Certainly the despair at his wasted opportunities and the prediction of the end of his singing days would fit in with his mood during that period.

But there was always an undercurrent of despair and sadness in Kendall’s poetry. It

is particularly apparent in ‘Cooranbean’, published in the *Town and Country Journal*, 11 January 1879.<sup>44</sup> It is a bleak, dark poem:

The brand of black devil is there – an evil wind mooneth around –  
There is doom, there is death in the air: a curse groweth up from the ground!

Cooranbean was the name Peter Fagan gave to his cottage. The poem evokes the 1865 tragedy when Peter Fagan accidentally poisoned his wife, his wife’s sister and his daughter with strychnine, given in mistake for quinine.<sup>45</sup>

A furlong of fetid, black fen, with gelid green patches of pond,  
Lies dumb by the horns of the glen – at the gates of the horror beyond.

There is no doubt that the time at Gosford enabled Kendall to recover from the urban torments of Melbourne and Sydney. In *Henry Kendall: His Later Years* Kendall’s son Frederick quotes Henry’s tribute to the Fagans: ‘these gentlemen, who worked so hard on my behalf, put up with so much for my sake, and endured so patiently my peculiarities, can never be compensated – never be forgotten.’<sup>46</sup> 21 October 1880 he wrote a note of introduction to Marcus Clarke for Michael Fagan, who ran the Camden Haven branch of the family timber business, and was visiting Melbourne: ‘I want you to know the bearer. He is the man who led me out of Gethsemane and set me in the sunshine.’ But Clarke was too ill to see him.<sup>47</sup> When the poems written at and after his stay at Gosford were collected in *Songs from the Mountains* in 1880 he inscribed a copy: ‘I give this book to Peter Fagan, one of three noble brothers who led me out of Gethsemane. Henry Kendall. 4th May 1881.’<sup>48</sup>

Kendall always recalled his eighteen months at Gosford positively, happy with the friendship of the Fagans, and happy at his own recovery of responsibility in his life.<sup>49</sup> A. G. Wise records in ‘Round and About Gosford’ that Charles Fagan wrote to Kendall with a request, 29 June 1875,

to frame petitions for a road from Gosford to Narara Ferry, and for an annual grant for the repairs required on the Gosford to Possum Creek Road. Kendall endorsed the note as follows: This is from Mr Fagan, the magistrate with whom I lived at Gosford. The Joe and William he mentions are his brothers. They are all noble fellows. It was I who brought about the establishment of a post office here (i.e., at Gosford). I also wrote the petitions which led to the deepening of Brisbane Water, and two annual grants for the roads. Before I left Gosford the inhabitants presented me with a watch, etc. I only mention these facts to show that I must have been behaving myself properly while I was in the specified district.<sup>50</sup>

Kendall's arrival in Gosford is one of the most significant events of his life. Indeed, it saved his life, restoring him to health, providing him with paid employment, and inspiring him to resume writing poetry, which he continued to do for a further nine productive years. And George Fagan was there at the end.<sup>51</sup> Frederick Kendall recounts how Kendall's position as Inspector of State Forests turned out to be gruelling: 'The work was really too much for him and he fell ill and had to fall back on Sydney in April, 1882.'

My mother rushed down from Cundle to nurse him, but he pluckily recovered and faced another winter journey, this time accompanied by George Fagan, an old friend, for whose expenses my mother arranged. This gentleman left him at Waroo, on the Lachlan, in May, apparently in fair health, but my father, through travelling in wet clothes, contracted a severe chill and returned to Wagga on the 5th of June. He collapsed there and sent a wire to Sydney for help. George Fagan found him and brought him to Sydney, where, on the 14th of June, he entered St Vincent's hospital. Here my mother, hastily summoned from her family at Cundle, tended him and shared his private ward for five weeks.

He was then taken to the Fagans' house at 137 Bourke Street, Redfern, where he died on 1 August 1882.<sup>52, 53</sup>

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# John Farrell

In his splendid, pioneering study *John Farrell, Poet, Journalist and Social Reformer 1851–1904*, Paul Stenhouse makes the case for John Farrell as an integral figure in the radical literary and political ferment of the 1880s and 1890s in Australia. Henry Lawson, ‘Banjo’ Paterson, Barbara Baynton are all remembered, but Farrell has been forgotten. He was one of the only ten writers featured amongst the 80 illustrations to A. W. Jose’s *History of Australasia*, first published in 1899 and in its sixth edition by 1917. Yet you will be hard put to it to find his work reprinted or discussed in any anthology or history of Australian literature today.<sup>1</sup>

For the first time we have a full picture of the man. And for the first time we have a sense of his work. As Ken Stewart remarks in *Investigations in Australian Literature*: ‘the neglected verse of John Farrell wittily exploits Byron’s *ottava rima* techniques, and provides some of the most stinging satire of the colonial period.’<sup>2</sup> Satiric verse, political verse, comic verse, as well as lyrics and verse portraits, poured from his pen. Stenhouse has identified some 133 poems by Farrell, most of them published anonymously, and many never reprinted. He makes a point of reprinting a significant number of them. Alongside these, Farrell wrote a substantial number of prose articles and editorials, in Australian and overseas publications, that importantly are also represented here.

Farrell began his career contributing to a couple of regional papers, the *Hampden Guardian* and the *Albury Banner*, from 1875 onwards. Through the 1880s he was a prolific contributor to the newly-established *Bulletin*. And from February till October 1890 he was editor of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, continuing as a member of the leader-writing staff until June 1903, resigning when the paper became increasingly anti-labour in its policies. And during these years he was editor of a number of papers, amongst them the *Lithgow Enterprise* and the *Australian Standard*. As well as a writer and editor he was a radical activist, writing and campaigning in the cause of the land nationalisation and single tax movement associated with the American social theorist Henry George.<sup>3</sup>

Stenhouse explores in detail the single taxers’ campaigns and organisation. The



movement was given massive impetus in 1890 when Henry George visited Australia. Farrell accompanied George at every stage of his New South Wales tour, and wrote about it for the New York *Standard*.

Henry Lawson recalled in his 'Pursuing Literature in Australia' in the *Bulletin*, 21 January 1891, how as a youth 'I watched old fossickers and farmers reading *Progress and Poverty* earnestly and arguing over it Sunday afternoons.' George's *Progress and Poverty*, published in the USA in 1879, was serialised in a Sydney paper in the same year and his ideas were widely disseminated. Lawson's 'A Day on a Selection' (*Bulletin*, 28 May 1892) ends with the hilarious – or tragicomic – episode in which the selector and his neighbour attempt to discuss the ideas of the radical American theorists Henry George, Ignatius Donnelly and Edward Bellamy over dinner, while interruptions from children and chooks prevent anything substantial from being said.

'Land nationalisation,' William Lane wrote in *The Boomerang*, 'would do more in a single day than protection will do in a century, towards adjusting and keeping perpetually adjusted that distribution of wealth, the present mismanagement of which is the cause of all poverty, nearly all crime, and most vice.'<sup>4</sup> George's *Social Problems* was the second work discussed by Lane in his 'Books Well Worth Reading' series in the *Worker*, 1 April 1890, and copies of *Progress and Poverty* were available from *The Worker* Book Fund. Lane, like most of the radical movement, ultimately abandoned George's theories, and in the last issue of *The Worker* that he edited, 30 July 1892, he ran on its front page Karl Marx's letter on George's theories: 'the man is a back number.'<sup>5</sup> But Farrell and others, including Catherine Spence and Rose Scott, continued to espouse George's theories, and they remained in circulation. As late as 1934 in Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, the character Baruch Mendelssohn – 'my first study of my husband-to-be,' she said in an interview – quotes from George on how the current capitalist system crowds 'human beings into noisome cellars, and squalid tenement houses, fills prison and brothels, goads men with want and consumes them with greed, robs women of the grace of perfect womanhood, takes from little children the joy and innocence of life's morning.'

The single tax movement was one of a number of organisations circulating radical ideas in Australia. As Stenhouse demonstrates, George's theories were to influence the programme of the early years of the Australian Labor Party. The stress was on a single tax only – on unimproved land values – and a refusal of any tax

on commodities, since commodity taxes impoverished the poor and privileged the wealthy. The English conservative politician Benjamin Disraeli had made the same point about the injustice of excise duties, which fell most heavily on the poor, in his novel *Sybil* (1845).

Another radical organisation was the Knights of Labor, founded in the USA in 1869, and combining the function of a trade union with an opposition to the wage system as a whole. Their success in the 1885 railway workers' strike dramatically increased their influence. Lane regularly quoted from their journal *United Labor in The Boomerang*. But their later defeat demonstrated, Farrell wrote, that 'organised labor was no match for the power of monopoly.' Farrell, Lane and Lawson were all members of the Balmain 'Freedom Assembly' of the organisation in 1891.

Republicans, single taxers, Knights of Labor, trades unionists, Socialists and Marxists all contributed to the emergent Labor movement, and the debates were vigorous. In his novel *The Workingman's Paradise* (1890) Lane has the character Geisner criticise the single tax movement: 'The capitalists ... will soon arrange a way of fixing the values of land to suit themselves,' and goes on to offer an analysis influenced by Marx.<sup>6</sup> Lane had discussed Marx in the fifth of his 'Books Worth Reading' series in the *Worker*, 1 July 1890: 'For we workers are all Socialists nowadays, though some of us are so ignorant that we don't know it. We follow Marx in the contention that labour's rightful share of Production is *all*.'

Despite political disagreements, Lane and Farrell became friends, and their two families used to meet when the Lanes were living in Sydney, along with Mary Cameron (later Mary Gilmore), waiting to sail to Paraguay to establish the New Australia settlement in 1893.

At the height of the shearers' strike Lane published Henry Lawson's first contribution to the *Worker*, 16 May 1891, the poem 'Freedom on the Wallaby'. Two weeks later the *Bulletin* published Farrell's no less radical poem 'The Weakness of Mr King – a Ballad of Coreena' commemorating a confrontation between strikers and strike breakers, in which the military arrested five strikers and took them back in handcuffs to Brisbane. Henry Lawson's radical verse of the 1890s is still remembered, but Farrell's has been forgotten until now. Stenhouse reminds us how Lawson recorded his admiration for Farrell: 'I as a lad worshipped him, even more than I did Gordon, perhaps because he was so new and real – the first of my own time, the head of a distinct school ... Personally he was up to my then ideal of a poet.'<sup>7</sup>

In his biography *Henry Lawson* Colin Roderick writes:

In the letter of 7 June [1888] that marked the first contact between John Farrell and Lawson, Farrell complimented him on his control of the 'Don Juanesque' metre in some verses he had sent to the *Enterprise*, verses that Lawson observed years later were of a satirical nature ... Farrell's encouragement induced Lawson to send him more verses, and in reply Farrell wrote, 'Keep on writing and do not have any doubt as to the result. I am sure you will achieve very fine success yet.'

Nonetheless, Roderick notes, Farrell was strongly critical in the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 February 1896, of the later 'raucous bush jingoism, cooeing aloud for blood' of Lawson's 'The Star of Australasia'.<sup>8</sup>

Farrell encouraged Lawson's writing, lent him money, and converted him to the single tax programme. 'He was I think the first editor to send me a cheque for a guinea, certainly the first country one. The living poet hero of my unhappy boyhood became the good, strengthening and comforting friend of later and not brighter years,' Lawson recalled. 'I owed him much, in many ways.'

J. F. Archibald, the founder of the *Bulletin*, wrote, 'Few men on the press of Australia at any period in our literary history have been so powerful for good as John Farrell.' The *Bulletin* was central to Farrell's literary production and his dealings with it and its editors are fully explored by Stenhouse. His friends and associates amongst his contemporaries included Francis Adams, Barbara Baynton, Edwin Brady, Fred Broomfield, Victor Daley, Mary Gilmore, Philip Holdsworth, Sydney Jephcott, A. B. Paterson, and Brunton Stephens. Daley's elegy on Farrell, which Stenhouse valuably reprints, stands with Henry Kendall's moving elegies on Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke.

Farrell and the Sydney bookseller and publisher George Robertson,<sup>9</sup> founder of Angus & Robertson, Stenhouse tells us, 'dined regularly, year in, year out, until Farrell's death in 1904.' In his biography *George Robertson*, Anthony Barker quotes a letter from Robertson to Zora Cross in 1922: 'John Farrell (do you know his 'Australia to England'?) introduced me to your 'Unspoken Thoughts' thirty-odd years ago, and it's one of the things for which I hold him in grateful remembrance.' (But, Ken Stewart points out, 'Unspoken Thoughts' was by Ada Cambridge; her married name was Mrs George Cross, which may explain George Robertson's confusion.)

Farrell's friendships in the political world were equally extensive. Stenhouse records: 'Among the early single taxers who owed their start in politics to Farrell, and upon whom his influence rested long after his death were Joseph Cook, Frank Cotton, William Morris Hughes, William Arthur Holman, George S. Beeby, Walter E. Johnson, George Black, John Haynes, R. Hollis, and William Affleck.' E. W. O'Sullivan, William Bede Dalley, Thomas Courtney, Alexander Sutherland, and James Ryan are amongst the many other journalistic and political friends who appear in this study.

Then there was the politician Henry Parkes, who himself was author of six volumes of poetry, and who had, like Farrell, established and edited a newspaper, *Empire*. It ran from 1850 until 1858, when Parkes closed it down and soon after went bankrupt with debts in excess of £53,000. Parkes was sympathetic to literary men and had supported the poet Henry Kendall, despite Kendall's sometimes vitriolic verse attacks on him. Farrell similarly attacked Parkes. Stenhouse valuably quotes some of these splendid verses at length, with their recurrent harping on 'the dread Kiama Ghost.' In March 1868 Henry James O'Farrell had attempted to assassinate the Duke of Edinburgh in Sydney. Despite the Duke's plea for clemency, O'Farrell was hanged. Parkes, member of parliament for Kiama and NSW Colonial Secretary and Minister for Police, eagerly and opportunistically played the terrorist card, promoting the idea that the incident was part of a Sinn Fein conspiracy. The evidence suggests that this was not the case, the public was unimpressed, and the NSW Government collapsed the following year. Farrell never let Parkes forget the episode; nor did Kendall, as Michael Ackland records in *Henry Kendall: The Man and the Myths*.<sup>10</sup> But Parkes was tolerant of poets, and Stenhouse notes how Farrell believed that it was largely due to Parkes that he was offered the editorship of the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Kendall nor Farrell receives a mention in the standard scholarly biography of Parkes.<sup>12</sup>

Of the work of his Australian predecessors, Henry Kingsley's novel *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) and the poetry of Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall were significant amongst Farrell's wide reading. Kendall he especially admired, writing: 'He was the dreamer of dreams among Australia's singing band – the man who walked in a natural opium trance of lights and shadows.' Could he have known of Kendall's opiate addiction that resulted in

his incarceration in Gladesville Hospital in 1871? His bond with Kendall may have been strengthened by their shared connection with South America – both Farrell’s and Kendall’s father having been born there – and their shared Irish heritage. His polemical verse has much in common with Kendall’s – not least in their partiality for *ottava rima* and their shared onslaughts on Henry Parkes.

Farrell’s political poems, Stenhouse establishes, follow the models of Dryden, Swift and Pope. He also read and admired Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne and Kipling, along with Browning (with reservations) and Edward Fitzgerald. But, significantly, Farrell, like Marcus Clarke, was also open to literature from the USA. Stenhouse notes that Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, Poe, Whitman, Whittier, Joaquin Miller and Colonel John Hay were influences, and in addition his reading included John Boyle O’Reilly, Amelia Rivers and Ella Wheeler Wilcox amongst others. And he especially admired the work of Bret Harte.

Bret Harte became an important influence on Australian writers in the 1870s when the Melbourne publisher George Robertson was issuing Australian editions of American writers like Harte and Mark Twain. Marcus Clarke wrote an enthusiastic review of Harte’s *The Luck of Roaring Camp* in the March 1871 *Australian Journal*:

We have always urged upon Australian writers of fiction the importance of delineating the Australian manners which they see around them every day, instead of dishing up the English customs which are current 20,000 miles away. The success with which Mr Bret Harte – a San Franciscan, whose name we never heard until Mr Robertson introduced it to us – has pictured the diggers of California, makes us regret that our advice has not been taken.<sup>13</sup>

Clarke identified those aspects of Harte’s work that were to make him so appealing a model to Australian writers. He continued:

The notion that, because a thing is common it is unclean, and that the ordinary daily life of our colony contains no poetry and no pathos, is, of all notions, the most foolish. In no condition of human society can poetry and pathos be wanting; for, to eliminate them from a record of human struggles, it would be necessary to annihilate human feeling. But in a new country, where the breaking down of social barriers, and the uprooting of social prejudices, tend to cultivate that incongruity which is, in reality, the very soul of pathos, there are opportunities for fresh and vigorous delineation of human character which the settled society of the old world does not offer.

Harte became immensely popular. Henry Gyles Turner remarked on his

influence on Marcus Clarke's stories,<sup>14</sup> and William Bede Dalley reviewing Kendall's last book, *Songs of the Mountains* and Farrell's first book, *How He Died*, in each case remarked on the qualities they shared with Bret Harte.<sup>15</sup> As for Mark Twain, Farrell was amongst those who met him on his visit to Australia, part of a world lecture tour designed to pay off Twain's debts, which resulted in Twain's *Following the Equator* (1897).<sup>16</sup>

The neglect of John Farrell in the years since his death, though unjustified, regrettable and scandalous, is neither unique nor surprising. He was not completely forgotten. He is the subject of an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, by Barry Andrews. But his writings have received little notice until this study. As Stenhouse succinctly remarks, 'part of the reason for this lies in his uncompromising commitment to social and economic reform.' The waning influence of the single tax and land nationalisation movement further contributed to his exclusion from the literary and political record. Although single taxers were in the forefront of the early Labor Party in NSW, and for a while controlled the party executive, their influence waned. Of the various components of radical thought in the 1880s and 1890s, the single tax movement, with its refusal of any tax on commodities since commodity taxes impoverished the poor and privileged the wealthy, was one that was abandoned and forgotten. Forgotten to such an extent that it was a federal Labor treasurer who first proposed introducing a goods and services tax in 1985. What would Farrell have written about that?

Foreword to Paul Stenhouse, *John Farrell, Poet, Journalist and Social Reformer 1851–1904*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018. An abridged version appeared in *Annals Australasia*, August 2018.

# Henry Lawson – Ethnic Writer

Henry Lawson is without doubt the most representatively Australian writer, a nationalist icon. I want here to look at the multicultural components of that nationalism; for though not often stressed, they are strongly there.

Lawson, of course, was not properly his name. His father was a Norwegian who jumped ship in Australia and tried his luck on the goldfields, Niels Hertzberg Larsen. He married Louisa Albury, who had been born in Australia, and when their first child was born he was christened Henry Hertzberg Lawson: Hertzberg after his Norwegian father, Henry after his gipsy maternal grandfather, Henry Albury, Lawson for Australian acceptance. That archetypal migrant experience, the surrender of one's name for something more acceptable to the new society, was Lawson's experience. 'Our name, of course, is Larsen by rights.' (1, 9)<sup>1</sup>

He was always conscious of his marginal status, the son of a foreign father, the grandson of people without a nation, the gipsies. One of his most moving stories, not published until 1913, is called 'A Child in the Dark, and a Foreign Father' and is based on his own childhood.

Down the hard road to the crossing at Pipeclay Creek sounded the footsteps of a man. Not the crunching steps of an English labourer, clod-hopping contentedly home; these sounded more like the footsteps of one pacing steadily to and fro, and thinking steadily and hopelessly – sorting out the past. (2, 141)

Economically Lawson evokes the note Bob Dylan was to evoke: 'Pity the poor immigrant, who wishes he'd stayed home.' The father is called Nils. The same situation is alluded to in 'The Golden Graveyard' where the settler is called Peter Olsen. (1, 744) Peter was the name that Lawson's father eventually took in Australia, dropping the Niels Hertzberg.

Lawson was sometimes to stress his Scandinavian ancestry, signing verse Henrik Hertzberg Larsen. And his stories are studded with immigrants – Scandinavian, Irish, German, Italian, Scots, English, Gipsy, Chinese and Afghan. The difficulties and tragedies of immigration, the immigrants who return, are the subject of 'Barney Take Me Home Again' in *Children of the Bush*, and one of his most ambitious stories,

‘Triangles of Life’, published in the volume of that name. ‘Remember I was brought up in a German district,’ he wrote in his ‘Autobiography’, adding ‘but always had a leaning towards all that was French in history and literature.’ In the last story in *Joe Wilson and his Mates*, ‘The Little World Left Behind’, he describes revisiting the district.

There was the cluster of farms on the flat, and in the foot on the gully, owned by Australians of Irish or English descent, with the same number of stumps in the wheat paddock, the same broken fences and tumble-down huts and yards, and the same weak, sleepy attempt made every season to scratch up the ground and raise a crop. And along the creek the German farmers – the only people here worthy of the name – toiling (men, women, and children) from daylight till dark, like slaves, just as they always had done; the elder sons stoop-shouldered old men at thirty.

The row about the boundary fence between the Sweeneys and the Joneses was unfinished still, and the old feud between the Dunderblitzens and the Blitzendunders was more deadly than ever – it started three generations ago over a stray bull. (2, 691–2)

Not only did Lawson grow up in a German district, he was later to marry the daughter of two German immigrants, Bertha Marie Louise Bredt. And in the Joe Wilson stories Mary, Joe’s wife, is presented as of German descent: ‘Mary’s mother was the daughter of a German immigrant’ who ‘made money, and lost it, and drank – and died.’

Mary remembered him sitting on the verandah one evening with his hand on her head, and singing a German song (the ‘Lorelei’ I think it was) softly, as if to himself. (1, 700)

In the series he wrote in the *Bulletin* in 1914 and 1915, ‘Amongst My Own People’, in which he returns to where he grew up, Lawson reverts to his father’s surname: ‘So I, Henry Hertzberg Larsen, sit in the house my father built’ (2, 654) he writes in ‘The Last Shaft in Log Paddock.’ The theme of immigration is recurrent. He goes on to recall ‘the German – or “Dutchman”’ fossicker who disappeared. ‘Maybe he’s a happy man now in Cristiana, Stockholm or Helsingfors’ (2, 655). Lawson sits ‘writing by night in the “front room” of the old home’:

‘Young Jack’ McDermott (he’s about thirty-three) will be home soon from an Irish-German wedding down at Müller’s farm, with a ridiculous and grossly exaggerated account of the whole business ... Also he’ll bring a bottle of good Weinsberg port wine for me from a vineyard across the Creek.

Dawn breaking above Golden Gully. Then, slowly, the sunrise over old



Mount Buckaroo purples all along the Mudgee Hills. The old German vineyards are flushed above the slopes beyond the dark-green she-oaks across Pipeclay Creek. But they are greatly changed. They have long got away from the old, cast-iron, immigrant German generation and the first Australian-Germans, the fixed idea as an idea can only be fixed in Teuton minds, that vines would grow nowhere but on a sunny slope. Nowadays the best are grown on the levels above and some even on the creek flats. The slopes, from which the old, old vines were uprooted, are bare and 'scalded', and will probably grow nothing for years. Very modern houses and cellars have taken the places of the old German, snake-infested ones. (2, 656–7)

Immigration is examined both in its cost and tragedies, and in its achievements. And Lawson could also draw out some of the comic aspects. In 'Table Legs, Wooden Heads, and a Woman's Heart' he recalls séances with his parents in his childhood. 'A Norwegian spook' sends messages but 'the more hesitation father seems to show in translating the messages of Nils the wilder mother gets.' "I thought all your relations learnt English before they left Norway," says mother to father.' (1, 745, 746). It is a very funny story, full of heavy menace, published late in Lawson's life, in the *Bulletin* in 1919.

'Lawson is a nomad; the gipsy blood must have pulsed in the veins of his forbears,' Price Warung wrote in the *Bathurst Free Press* reviewing *While the Billy Boils*. In his autobiography Lawson described his maternal grandfather, Henry Albury, as

a big, strong, man, who came from Kent with his family. Wavy black hair, worn long, and profile Roman. His people were supposed to have been gipsies, and he was very gipsy-like in his habits. (1, 13)

This gipsy heritage was something that came into focus for Lawson after his stay in England. The appalling treatment of the gipsies in Europe was one further example of oppression, paralleling the class oppressions recorded in his earlier work. In 'Triangles of Life' Lawson intrudes into the story with an apparently incidental account of a visit he made to a gipsy encampment in England. The farmer is 'jest shiftin' of 'em on, as the sayin' is.'

'But, Mr Leonard,' I said, 'one of the young women's just had a child, and she surely could never stand the jolting on in that caravan. It would kill her, man.'

'Don't you be afraid of that, as the sayin' is,' he said, 'they're only animals, so the sayin' is – an.' And so on. (2, 296)

But as well as recording the attitude of mind of the English farmer to the gipsies,

Lawson also records the ambiguity of his own feeling when he has the old gipsy fortune-teller say to him:

‘You have brown eyes, and your people may have been of our people once. But you fear the black eyes! You fear the black eyes!’ That was a fact, anyway. (2, 299)

The fortune-teller catches Lawson’s ambiguity. He believes he is descended from gipsies and at the same time he fears them. His ambivalence is the theme of ‘Joe Wilson’s Courtship’ where Joe, who is in part a version of Lawson himself, fights

a big shearer, a dark, handsome fellow, who looked like a gipsy. It was reckoned that there was foreign blood in him. He went by the name of Romany ... He had the nastiest temper and the best violin in the district. (1, 701)

In part this is Lawson fighting his Bohemian self, putting clean-living Joe into conflict with that classic sexual threat of the swarthy gipsy musician. ‘Make the most of your courting days, you young chaps, and keep them clean ...’ (1, 694) Joe advises early in the story. But the person Joe really wants to fight is the jackaroo who is visiting the property and paying court to Joe’s beloved Mary. Joe cannot fight the jackaroo because of their class difference; Joe is a worker, the jackaroo is from the landowning class. So Joe fights the Romany on the pretext of a dismissive remark Romany makes about Mary. What Lawson incisively shows is how an inexpressible aggression to the ruling class is displaced into a socially permissible aggression to the scapegoat, outcast, racial minority figure, the Romany.

Lawson’s self-identification with the Romany allowed him to perceive the nature of racism. Many of his stories record the unthinking racism of Australian life: but to record the unthinking is not to endorse it, nor to be unthinking about it. In *Children of the Bush* (1902) Lawson celebrates the spirit of union solidarity, mateship, with Biblical analogies of the good Samaritan. And in portraying the racist limitations of 1890s unionism, at the same time he shows that very racism being transcended. In ‘Send Round the Hat’, the opening story, he describes the spontaneous charity of ‘The Giraffe’, the tall, gangling bushman who is always making collections for the down and out. And though the Giraffe’s proposal to collect for ‘a poor, sick Afghan’ results in his physically being carried out of the ‘Carrier’s Arms’ – the Afghans being resented by the carriers for competing with and undercutting their business – nonetheless Lawson notes that ‘about dusk, he was seen slipping down towards the Afghan camp with a billy of soup.’ (2, 96) Lawson records both the teamsters’ resentment of the

Afghan competition, and at the same time has progressive socialism presented in action, crossing the colour line, as it was called. The point of this crossing of racial and national divides is reinforced immediately by a repeated situation.

A few days after the Afghan incident the Giraffe and his hand had a run of luck. A German, one of a party who were building a new wooden bridge over the Big Billabong, was helping unload some girders from a truck at the railway station, when a big log slipped on the skids and his leg was smashed badly. (1, 96)

The human cost of settling Australia was borne heavily by the migrant worker. The German was going home at the end of the contract, now his leg is smashed and he can't complete it. The Giraffe takes round his hat to raise the German's fare home. In 'On the Tucker Track' the old man with the wooden leg 'might have been Scandinavian' (1, 540); he is living alone, one of the used and discarded migrant labour force. In the service in 'Shall We Gather at the River' Peter McLaughlan, 'a Scotchman from London', deals with the theme explicitly in his sermon of reconciliation, making the native-born aware of the cost for their pioneering parents:

Exiles they were in the early days – boy-husbands and girl-wives some of them, who left their native lands, who left all that was dear, that seemed beautiful, that seemed to make life worth living, and sacrificed their young lives in drought and utter loneliness to make fortunes for their children. I want you young men to think of this. Some of them came from England, Ireland, Bonnie Scotland.' (Ross straightened up and let his hands fall loosely on this knees.) Some from Europe – your foreign fathers – some from across the Rhine in Germany.' (We looked at old Kurtz. He seemed affected.) (2, 25)

Australia is justly proud of Lawson. He is the one indisputably great writer, the writer who created Australia in literature. And in creating that image of Australia, Lawson never forgot the migrant contribution, and his own part in that, the son of a foreign father. He wrote in 'The Romance of the Swag' that Australia was

The land I love above all others – not because it was kind to me, but because I was born on Australian soil, and because of the foreign father who died at his work in the ranks of Australian pioneers, and because of many things. (2, 66)

*Outrider*, 9, 1, & 2, June 1992.

## ***Henry Lawson, a Stranger on the Darling***

In September 1892 the young Henry Lawson left Sydney for Bourke, not returning until the following June. Although he was becoming known for his poems and stories in *The Bulletin*, *Truth* and *The Worker*, he had not yet published a book. The trip out west was partly to get material to write about, partly to get some remunerative employment, and partly a scheme designed by friends and editors to get him away from the hotels of Lower George Street.

As things turned out, he found the hotels of Bourke congenial – there were nineteen of them – and work equally hard to get. He did some house painting and he worked as a labourer in the shearing sheds. After Christmas he set out on a 140 mile trek to Hungerford, stayed a day, and tramped back.

The experience of the horrors and the hardships of the outback remained with Lawson for ever. He found the exploitation of labour in the city replicated in the bush. It was the same financial system. The stations were owned by the same class of employers and financed by the same banks. As he wrote in ‘Bourke’,

For ever westward in the land, Australians hear – and will not heed –  
The murmur of the boardroom and the sure and stealthy steps of greed.

Nationalist commentators have tended to privilege this episode of Lawson’s venturing into the bush. ‘The never-forgotten trip to north-west New South Wales,’ wrote A. G. Stephens in *The Bulletin*, 29 August 1896, ‘which represented his sole experience of life outback.’<sup>1</sup> But the stress is more profitably put on the continuity of Lawson’s socialist education at Bourke, than on any supposedly unique encounter with landscape, topography and climate. It was not an idyllic heart of Australia he encountered, but an appalling work situation that was open to change. ‘We wish to heaven that Australian writers would leave off trying to make a paradise out of the Out Back Hell,’ he wrote; ‘if only out of consideration for the poor, hopeless, half-starved wretches who carry swags through it and look in vain for work – and ask in vain for tucker very often. What’s the good of making a heaven of a hell when by

describing it as it really is we might do some good for the lost souls there?’

At Bourke Lawson met those vanguard trades unionists who had pioneered the Australian Shearers Union and the General Labourers Union. They were also closely associated with William Lane’s New Australia movement, and a number went with Lane to Paraguay. Years later Lawson put them into his *Children of the Bush*, that powerful collection of stories focused on themes of socialist cooperation and union organisation that he published in London in 1902.<sup>2</sup> They appear with their names minimally changed and their union roles spelled out: Teddy Thomson, Tom Hicks-Hall, William Wood and Donald Macdonald.

These were crucial friendships that Lawson made. The commitment of these men, their determination and optimism, remained an inspiration to Lawson throughout his life. They served to counterbalance and ameliorate his otherwise horror-struck, negative impressions of outback life. They balanced his pessimism and defeatism with a sense of hope and possibility, opposed his sense of individual isolation with a programme of co-operation. The combination, of hope and despair, formed that characteristic bitter-sweet plangency of Lawson’s writing, the unique note that contributes to his greatness.

Colin Roderick’s indispensable biography *Henry Lawson – A Life*<sup>3</sup> chronicles this period of Lawson’s life comprehensively and succinctly. *Henry Lawson: A Stranger on the Darling* by Robyn Burrows and Alan Barton revisits and supplements this material. It is a labour of love, a scrap book of Bourke local history, with meticulously recorded details of such things as newspaper ownership, building developments, and participants in the Eight-Hour Day parade. It records not only the licensees of the hotels Lawson may have drunk at in Bourke but also the sites of the waterholes he may have drunk at on his tramp to Hungerford. It also reprints pretty well everything Lawson wrote that drew on his Bourke experiences. Anthologised in its pages yet once more are those classic stories ‘The Union Buries its Dead’, ‘That Pretty Girl in the Army’, ‘Send Round the Hat’, poems like ‘The Boss’s Boots’, ‘Out Back’, and ‘The Paroo River’, and many other essays, sketches, stories and ballads familiar and unfamiliar. Altogether some seventy-five stories, poems and letters of Lawson’s are reprinted. The volume’s claim to originality is the reprinting of eight poems previously believed to be lost. Arriving in Bourke Lawson was commissioned by the *Western Herald* to write on the local political scene, and the pseudonymous pieces he published have now been rescued from oblivion. Their discovery will not

alter any general assessment of Lawson's work. They were part of the journeyman verse journalism he produced at this time to make an income. But they have some passages that retain their sad relevance today. Lawson's socialist suspicion of Labor parliamentarians deserves reprinting:

He seemed to love the workers all, but cared a curse for none.  
An' now he's fighting boldly in the cause of NUMBER ONE.  
For though he praised the sons of toil, an' d---d the sons of Pelf,  
He's not a Labour member, he is member for himself.

*Henry Lawson: A Stranger on the Darling* in effect offers us an anthology of Lawson's writings about north-west New South Wales, with interleaved commentary. And what a pleasure it is to read Lawson again, after endless vapid post-modern and sub-modern texts. Here is a writer with a vision of the world, a writer who observed reality and who had something to say about it, a writer with commitment and compassion and above all a writer who could write. His touch is so delicate, so economical, and so precise and he speaks to us today as movingly and meaningfully as he did when he wrote over a century ago.<sup>4</sup>

*Weekend Australian*, December 7–8, 1996.

## William Lane, *The Workingman's Paradise*

William Lane was born in Bristol, England on 6 September 1861, and died in Auckland, New Zealand on 26 August 1917. He was the eldest of five sons and one daughter. His brother John, next in age, recalled that the family

sprung from peasant blood of County Cork and County Gloucester. Lane combined the sturdy persistence and love of adventure of the West Saxon, with the warm-hearted idealism and brilliance of the Celt. His English mother's Puritan influence remained with him throughout his life; and the evils of drink bitterly felt by him in childhood, made him a life-long enemy of alcohol.<sup>1</sup>

His father, as the youngest brother, E. H. Lane, put it 'had emerged from a peasant environment in Ireland to that of a humble member of the petty bourgeoisie',<sup>2</sup> an Irish protestant of strong conservative politics; a landscape gardener, he had at one time employed twenty workmen but had been proletarianised into poverty and alcoholism. John Lane records of William that before he was sixteen he struck out for himself, and migrated to America, landing in New York, penniless, friendless and unknown. He worked at odd jobs in town and country; as shop boy in stores, as handy boy on farms, and, finally, after varied experience in the United States and Canada, became printer's devil on a Detroit newspaper, where he worked up to be compositor, and then a reporter, in which he found his vocation. While doing press work in Detroit he married an American-bred granddaughter of a Scottish professor.<sup>3</sup>

Her name was Anne McQuire. William 'never took kindly to American ways and manners' according to John, and in 1885 emigrated to Australia, where his brothers Ernie and Frank had arrived the previous year. Settling in Brisbane he found work as a journalist for *Figaro*, the *Telegraph*, the *Courier* and the *Observer*. He wrote under various pseudonyms, one of which, 'John Miller', he used for his novel *The Workingman's Paradise*. The name derives from the opening chapter of William Morris's Marxist romance, *A Dream of John Ball* (1887), part of the password of the revolutionaries of John Ball's Peasant Revolt of 1381: 'John the Miller, hath y-ground small, small, small,' The correct reply was 'The king's son of heaven shall pay for all',<sup>4</sup>. It was the appropriate pseudonym for Lane's mystical, religious communism.

Together with a compositor friend Alfred Walker, Lane established *The Boomerang*, 19 November 1887, a weekly labour-liberal paper: 'A Live Newspaper – Born of the Soil.' From reporting on labour issues, Lane became increasingly involved in the trade union movement. He was one of those advocating the 'New Unionism' – the extension of the union movement into non-skilled, non-craft, non-trade areas to form a united body of the working class. 'He felt that if only the working classes could be got to understand the why and wherefore of things, then, and then only, would it be possible to change living conditions, so that life for all would be worth living', wrote John Lane.<sup>5</sup> He was chief architect of the Queensland Australian Labour Federation (ALF), planned as the spearhead of a federal organisation of unions.

*The Boomerang* ran into financial difficulties and came under pressure from advertisers restricting editorial freedom. Lane resigned. The ALF established a new paper, *The Worker*, and Lane was appointed editor. The first issue appeared on 1 March 1890 and having been boycotted by the newsboys, was sold along the line of the Eight-Hour Day procession by volunteers. In 1891 government hostility to *The Worker* and fear of its influence resulted in the imposition of a postage charge on all newspapers, previously carried free, raising *The Worker's* subscription from two shillings to three shillings a year.<sup>6</sup>

Through *The Worker's* columns Lane attempted to direct the union movement beyond the specific concern of wages and employment into a wider political programme of socialism. 'Lane's role was to wed the labour movement in Queensland to the socialist ideal', Robin Gollan wrote; as a consequence, from 1887–93, Lane 'occupied a position of leadership that has rarely been equalled in the history of Australian radicalism.'<sup>7</sup> 'When future historians ever undertake the task of analysing and assigning the causes and effects and course of the phenomenon of Australian Socialism', A. St Ledger wrote in 1909, 'Lane's writings in *The Worker* will be found the *fons et origo* from which all further and subsequent explorations must begin.'<sup>8</sup> Lane's journalism of this period has never been collected, but four examples of his work are reprinted in Manning Clark's *Select Documents in Australian History 1851–1900*.<sup>9</sup>

The newly organised unions were immediately tested in the financial crisis of 1890–93. The employers organised amongst themselves and a succession of strikes ensued. 'Writers on the period agree substantially that the aim of the employers was



to break the unions.<sup>10</sup> The first part of *The Workingman's Paradise*, Lane points out in the preface, covers two days 'during the summer of 1888–9'; the second part is set 'at the commencement of the Queensland bush strike excitement in 1891' (p. iii). The novel begins, that is, with the union movement untested; between parts one and two came the Maritime Strike; and the novel ends with the beginning of the Shearers' Strike. These political confrontations are the off-stage determinants of the characters' political consciousness; they are a major unwritten, but present, component of the novel. The events occur off-stage, but they are also assumed to be known, so vast, so public. Robin Gollan indicates the strikes' significance as mass action, mythic confrontation.

The Maritime Strike began in August 1890, and soon involved transport workers, miners and shearers in the eastern colonies, South Australia and New Zealand for periods of a fortnight to two months. The whole of the trade union movement was involved financially, and many workers not on strike were thrown out of work. The issues were, on the union side, "the recognition of unionism", by which they meant the exclusive right of the unions to negotiate working conditions in industry. On the employers' side the issue was "freedom of contract", the right of employers to engage unionists or non-unionists, to work under union conditions or under conditions agreed to by individual employees. The strike was fought with great bitterness and as it progressed became open class warfare. The large numbers involved, and the mass demonstrations, such as the fifty thousand in Flinders Park, Melbourne, and the procession a mile and a half long through the streets of Sydney were quite different from anything that had previously occurred in the history of Australian unionism. In fact, the strike became a mass movement in support of specific trade union demands, but also implicitly, and in part consciously, a political movement in support of vaguely defined political objectives. The unions were defeated by lack of funds, by the employment of non-union labour and by the lack of a definite political objective.<sup>11</sup>

The Shearers' Strike began in the first week of January 1891 when unionists refused to sign the pastoralists' contract of 1890, which, after the defeat of the Maritime Strike, disavowed the principle of the closed shop. The agreement also reduced the rates for labourers in the shearing sheds, sometimes by upwards of thirty-three per cent; the labourers constituted sixty per cent of the employees on the stations.<sup>12</sup> Gollan records:

The Shearers' Strike was contested with even greater bitterness than had been the Maritime Strike. The issues were essentially the same, the "recognition of

unionism” and “freedom of contract”. But in Queensland, partly as a consequence of the socialist opinions of the union leadership, and partly because of the only thinly disguised partisanship of the government, from the first the strike was pictured by unionists as resistance to an attack on unionism by a combination of pastoralists and government.<sup>13</sup>

There were some 500 unionists camped near Clermont, and 1,000 at Barcaldine. By the third week in February 1891, 107 police, 140 special constables (mostly pastoralists and their employees) and 151 military were in the Clermont district. By the end of March there were 29 officers and 509 men based in Barcaldine.<sup>14</sup> Altogether the Queensland Defence Force provided 1,357 men, 85 officers, 765 horses, 3 nine-pounder guns and 2 Nordenfelt machine guns ‘for special service in aid of civil power’, Colonel Drury’s report records.<sup>15</sup> ‘With the systematic arrest of union leaders in late March and early April, including the members of the strike committee, it was made much clearer that the strikers were likely to lose.’<sup>16</sup> Non-union labour was shipped into Queensland under armed guard. On 10 June the ALF executive asked the camps to consider calling off the strike as funds were now exhausted. There was no formal ending to the Queensland strike, but few held out beyond this date. The criminal statistics return for 1891 records 25 arrests for conspiracy, 100 for intimidation and 36 for riot and breach of the peace. Unionists comprised almost all of these arrests. ‘These were not the total range of charges brought against unionists, but in these three categories 82 out of the 86 men convicted were imprisoned for terms of upwards of three months in the case of intimidation, and of three years for conspiracy.’<sup>17</sup>

The leaders of the Barcaldine and Clermont Strike Committee were arrested on charges of ‘unlawful assembly, riot and tumult.’<sup>18</sup> They were acquitted, but the government prosecuted again under an 1825 conspiracy act, still in force in Queensland though repealed in England. Judge Harding gaoled twelve of the unionists for three years’ imprisonment each; Harding’s attacks on the police for failing to fire on assembled unionists, his bullying of the jury for three days until it came up with a verdict of guilty, and his contemptuous refusal to consider the jury’s recommendation of clemency, made the trials notorious. William Lane wrote *The Workingman’s Paradise* to raise funds for the families of the imprisoned unionists, and to draw out the socialist message of the Strike. Alec Forrester, one of the twelve gaoled for conspiracy, recited extracts from the novel in St Helena prison and was

sentenced to seven days on bread and water for his trouble.<sup>19</sup>

The first recorded use of the phrase 'the Workingman's Paradise' is in Henry Kingsley's novel, *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859): 'Australia, that Workingman's Paradise'.<sup>20</sup> Lane uses the phrase with bitter irony for his title. The phrase was turned ironically against him in the British Government's Foreign Office report on New Australia: 'New Australia was anything but a workingman's paradise'.<sup>21</sup> It is a resounding phrase; and it is the exposure of the ideology embodied in the phrase that is Lane's subject in his novel, an exposure effected by revealing the economic and social realities of the workers' life in this antipodean paradise.

*The Workingman's Paradise* does not deal with the detail of the shearers' strike. There was a considerable response to the strike in the writing of the time, as Clement Semmler has shown; and Lane appears as a character in Vance Palmer's play about the events, *Hail Tomorrow!* (1947).<sup>22</sup> But when Lane wrote, the strike had been defeated. He was concerned to widen the issues from a specific defeat into a socialist analysis of the society that generated the confrontation. His intention was to expound the basic ideas of socialism and communism in a readable and accessible form, to raise his readers' consciousness for the next round in the battle.

The novel's protagonist, Ned Hawkins, begins with a very moderate position. "We only want what's fair", he said. "We're not going to do anything wild." His naivety appals Nellie Lawton, the girl he comes down from Queensland to visit.

How dared he talk as he did about only wanting what was fair, she thought!  
How had he the heart to care only for himself and his mates while in these  
city slums such misery brooded! And then it shot through her that he did  
not know. With a rapidity, characteristic of herself, she made up her mind to  
teach him. (10)

And the novel consists of Nellie's opening Ned's eyes to the social conditions of Sydney, and directing his unionism into a committed socialism. "The evolution of Ned was the evolution of Lane and of the workers of Queensland", Lloyd Ross remarked.<sup>23</sup> And the political education of Ned is Lane's political education of his readers.

Lane's base had been Queensland, Brisbane in particular, but he was a frequent visitor to Sydney and he set the novel in Sydney because the aftermath of the shearers' strike had made it 'not thought desirable, for various reasons, to aggravate by a local plot the soreness existing in Queensland.'(iii)

Marcus Clarke in his 'Lower Bohemia'<sup>24</sup> series and John Stanley James in 'The Vagabond Papers'<sup>25</sup> had produced earlier exposés of Melbourne in the Mayhew tradition. Lane continued the mode in articles he wrote for the *Observer* and *Boomerang* under the name 'Sketcher', 'gradually taking up the task of exposing glaring cases of social injustice – over-crowded slums, sweated labour, and the long hours of shop assistants, waitresses, and tramway men.'<sup>26</sup> He was able to draw on these detailed accounts of inner-city living for the novel. The lack of any specifically industrial material indicates the Brisbane basis of his explorations; Brisbane did not have Sydney's industries, and this makes the novel present a somewhat distorted picture of working-class life in Sydney. The stress is on the housing, the living conditions, on cottage industries and on domestic and service employment. Ned, of course, is a bushman, a shearer, not an industrial worker: he was one of 'the genuine western men, strong, tall, brave, kind-hearted men, the best men in the whole world and the tenderest'<sup>27</sup> that Lane knew and in whom he put his faith, rather than one of the industrial proletariat.

Ned comes down to Sydney and suggests that he and Nellie go to visit some of the typical attractive leisure spots – 'to Manly or Bondi or Watson's Bay,' Nellie suggests they 'see a little bit of real Sydney' (13). So they see the slum housing; they see Mrs Somerville slaving in the cottage garment industry; they go to 'a fashionable Sydney restaurant' (23) where Nellie cross-questions the waitress about work conditions. They end up with 'Saturday Night in Paddy's Market', a chapter Leon Cantrell includes in his anthology *The 1890s*, arguing that

The most frequent picture of city life in Australian writing of the period stresses this poverty of the down and outs ...

Though William Lane's novel *The Workingman's Paradise* deals with the breaking of the strikes, it makes an impassioned plea for a socialist future where the distress and suffering we see in 'Saturday Night in Paddy's Market' will be swept aside.<sup>28</sup>

Other commentators have stressed Lane's English literary sources. Graeme Davison notes the influence of James Thomson's 'City of Dreadful Night' (1874),<sup>29</sup> whose mode had been followed in Australia by the 'Arnoldian Socialist' Francis Adams, a friend and fellow journalist of Lane's in Brisbane. John Docker points to Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850):

The tradition of seeing the urban landscape as the location of squalor and bitter class experience, equivalent to the “industrial tradition”, can certainly be witnessed in Lane’s *The Workingman’s Paradise*, and the evocation of “Saturday Night in Paddy’s Market” by Lane bears a remarkable similarity to a disgusted description of a Saturday night street market scene in working-class London in chapter eight of Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*. Yet both of these scenes, intended to typify working-class life in London and Sydney, can be contrasted to the chapter in Louis Stone’s *Jonah* (1911) which almost enviously evokes the pleasurable shopping and eating of the Saturday night crowd at Paddy’s Market.<sup>30</sup>

Kingsley’s street-market is discussed in P. J. Keating’s *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*:

Kingsley’s sole intention is to describe to the reader the horrors of working-class life; to recreate the feeling of repulsion experienced by himself ... he makes no attempt whatsoever to present it from a working-class viewpoint ... This kind of slum description is the most common in Victorian fiction before the eighties. They are not incidental but hold a central place in the novels, in that they are being used to grip the reader and stir his conscience. Almost everything else that happens in the novel depends upon such scenes for its vitality.<sup>31</sup>

But Lane had a political, didactic purpose. He was not recoiling in disgust, but analytically presenting the market, as Brian Kiernan points out, as ‘the focus for the critical depiction of Sydney’ with ‘Sydney as the centre of the exploitative capitalism that is dominating the whole continent.’<sup>32</sup>

After the market, Nellie takes Ned to visit a group of intellectuals, bourgeois Bohemians interested in the labour movement. The episode has been variously interpreted. Graeme Davison finds that ‘the salon conversation of his radical intellectuals (Geisner, the Strattons) exposes, even as Lane himself attempts to repair, their fragile alliance with the working classes.’<sup>33</sup> Whereas John Docker, countering Cantrell’s ‘Gloom Thesis’ argues ‘the novel in these sections can be seen as offering a glowing account of Sydney’s early nineties radical intellectual life’: ‘the house is surrounded by a leafy garden, and the inner spirit of the household is shown as at one with the natural world of the harbour.’<sup>34</sup> The opposed responses are not accidental. Lane saw the contradictions: they were the dialectic of his argument, from which Ned’s final commitment to the working-class movement through radical action issues.

Joseph Jones singled out the Stratton episode as the most successful part of the novel, which otherwise he found flawed:

Stagey, sentimental and exhortative by turns, it has more than its share of technical faults but it does nevertheless dramatise the perfervid attitudes of the day, most successfully in a long 'Medley of Conversation' held in the home of a middle-class Sydney family named Stratton.<sup>35</sup>

But when Lane was 'stagey' he was consciously stagey; he was a self-aware writer. After leaving the Strattons Nellie takes Ned through the Domain where the homeless sleep out. Here, in answer to Ned's queries as to 'What is Socialism?' Nellie kisses a sleeping prostitute on the cheek.

'This is Socialism.' And bending down again she kissed the poor outcast harlot a second time ... Perhaps if he had been less natural himself the girl's passionate declaration of fellowship with all who are wronged and oppressed – for so he interpreted it by the light of his own thoughts – might have struck him as a little bit stagey. Being natural, he took it for what it was, an outburst of genuine feeling. (p.100)

Joseph Jones's 'stagey' is a reaction Lane has taken into account: he accommodates, absorbs and situates it.

Arthur Rae, a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, and a vice-chairman of the New Australia Association, had a more practical complaint about the episode.

'Ah! Will,' said Rae, 'You didn't complete the picture. When the prostitute woke up she wouldn't know that she had been kissed by a girl. Nellie should have left half a crown in her hand – that would have been practical Socialism!'<sup>36</sup>

Robert Louis Stevenson, who visited Sydney four times between 1890 and 1893, described the plight of the homeless sleeping out in Sydney's Domain in *The Wrecker*.

The long day and longer night he spent in the Domain, now on a bench, now on the grass under a Norfolk pine, the companion of perhaps the lowest class on earth, the Larrikins of Sydney. Morning after morning, the dawn behind the lighthouse recalled him from slumber; and he would stand and gaze upon the changing east, the fading lenses, the smokeless city, and the many-armed and many masted harbour growing slowly clear under his eyes. His bed-fellows (so to call them) were less active: they lay sprawled upon the grass and benches, the dingy men, the frowsty women, prolonging their late repose ... Yes, it's a queer place, where the dowagers and the kids walk all day, and at night you can hear people bawling for help as if it was the Forest of Bondy, with the lights of a great town all round, and parties spinning through in cabs from Government House and dinner with my lord!<sup>37</sup>

When Ned sleeps in the Domain there is no prolonging any late repose. A grinning gorilla-faced constable kicks him in the ribs and threatens to run him in for indecent exposure.

Ned's rude awakening occurs in part two of the novel. Between the two parts came the defeat of the Maritime Strike, the worsening of the situation of the working class. The baby born in the first chapter of part one, dies in the first chapter of part two. Marcus Clarke had complained that 'the success of the "dying children" urged Dickens to extremes. Every book must have a dying child, and the trick becomes wearisome'.<sup>38</sup> But Clarke used the theme himself in *His Natural Life* and in the story of the child dying in the bush, 'Pretty Dick.' The child's bush death became a familiar theme in Australian fiction and painting. Lane shifts it back to the Dickensian urban milieu. But to see this as primarily a 'literary' topic and as sentimental or melodramatic, is to refuse to recognise the reality of nineteenth-century experience. Humphrey Osmond remarks

I am pretty sure no modern author has to remind himself not to introduce that incomparable tear-jerker, the dying child. Unlike the Victorian author, who could be certain of a large and deeply involved readership who had experienced the loss of brothers and sisters in the home, and who had lost a child or two as parents themselves, the modern author cannot expect such a predictable response.<sup>39</sup>

With Lane, the death of the child is firmly related to the slum housing conditions and working-class poverty. Capitalism is the cause of 'The Slaughter of an Innocent'.

Between the two parts Ned's consciousness has changed – through the experience of the Maritime Strike, in which the Queensland shearers were involved for one week in September 1890, and through the education from Nellie and Geisner. In Part I Nellie seizes every opportunity to propagandise. By Part II Ned similarly recruits the unemployed youth in the cheap lodging house. The capitalist Strong, whose appearance Ned likes in Part I, is encountered in Part II and revealed as an intransigent, unscrupulous power worshipper. The individual episodes of the novel have the force of illustrative vignettes; but they are all part of an ongoing dynamic, a process of revelation and commitment. And it is all situated in Sydney and around the harbour: 'the most beautiful spot I know,' says Geisner, in a context of a world in which 'all countries are beautiful in their way' (105). The beauty is there, the setting for what could become a just society, a paradise.

The progressive stages of Lane's own political development all find their place in *The Workingman's Paradise*. John Lane recalled that when he and William sailed to Australia on the Quetta in 1885, William 'had bought for study on shipboard a collection of books on political economy, including Karl Marx's *Capital*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*.<sup>40</sup>

The first English translation of *Capital* did not appear until 1887. William may have possessed it untranslated, or John may have placed Will's certain later acquaintance with *Capital* back in time a little. William certainly arrived in Brisbane radicalised. Ernie Lane recalls

to my horror I discovered that Will had evolved into a radical or worse. When he had left England for America some years before he had given me as a parting gift a Church of England prayer book in the fly leaf of which he had written 'Fear God and Honour the King.' That was the very foundation of our material and spiritual life. I reminded him of this. He had forgotten, and I said sadly, 'Don't you believe that now?' He laughed and replied 'No! And you won't some day when you know better.'<sup>41</sup>

Ten years in the USA had had a profound radicalising effect on William. He arrived in time to experience the Great Upheaval of 1877, the wave of general strikes that were, as President Hayes recorded in his diary, 'put down by force', and in which more than a hundred strikers and onlookers were killed by police and troops.<sup>42</sup> Henry George and Edward Bellamy, both Americans, were influences on his social thinking until he discovered Marx. And Lloyd Churchward notes that

William Lane had spent some time in Detroit before he settled in Brisbane and he had a high regard for the achievement of the Knights of Labor in the United States before he joined the Sydney-based Eureka Assembly of the Knights of Labor in 1891.<sup>43</sup>

The Knights of Labor had been founded in 1869. 'It combined the functions of a trade union with an opposition to the wage system as a whole, and originally had a deep religious strain as well.'<sup>44</sup> Unlike the traditional trade unions of that time, which generally represented only the highly skilled craftsmen and were concerned to maintain their comparatively privileged position in the labour force, 'the one great sentiment embodied in the Knights of Labor was the idea of solidarity among all workers, whether white or black, skilled or unskilled, men or women.'<sup>45</sup> The Knights were opposed to strike action; strikes distracted from the programme of



creating producers' co-operatives and of controlling monopoly through government, and strikes threatened to generate revolutionary disorder. But it was the Knights of Labor's success in the 1885 Railroad Workers Strike against the railway 'king' Jay Gould, that resulted in the rapid growth of their organisation – from 71,326 members in July 1884 to 729,677 members by July 1886. An organiser was sent to Australia in 1888,<sup>46</sup> and, Churchward notes, 'William Lane, in particular, quoted freely in *The Boomerang* during 1888–90 from *United Labor*, the journal of the Knights of Labor, printed in Philadelphia.'<sup>47</sup>

Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, which Will brought with him to Australia, had already been serialised in a Sydney newspaper in 1879, the year of its publication in the USA. And, as Churchward points out, land taxation and land nationalisation theories were already widespread in England and America before George's book. T. A. Coghlan's *Wealth and Progress of New South Wales*

revealed that while 212,639 selections were sold in New South Wales over twelve years, 1876–88, individual holdings of one acre upwards had increased only from 39,639 to 46,142. In 1889 580 persons held 25 million acres comprising 53 per cent of the alienated land of New South Wales. These facts caused the early Australian interest in progressive land taxation.<sup>48</sup>

Land nationalisation leagues were widely established through eastern Australia in 1887. Lane wrote in *The Boomerang*

Land nationalisation would do more in a single day than protection will do in a century towards adjusting and keeping perpetually adjusted that distribution of wealth, the present mismanagement of which is the cause of all poverty, nearly all crime, and most vice.<sup>49</sup>

In 1890 Henry George lectured in Australia, expounding his 'single tax' programme, and attracted a considerable following. The novelist Catherine Spence was active in the single-tax movement in South Australia, and the poet and journalist John Farrell in New South Wales. Churchward argues that

the influence of Henry George on the Australian Labour movement was a general rather than a specific one. No part of the Labour movement accepted the panacea of the 'single tax' but George's books and his visit to Australia in 1890 did much to popularise the principle of the taxation of unimproved land values and partly explains the prominence of this principle in the early Labour Party platforms. More generally still his visit in 1890 helped arouse the sections of

the middle class to the claims of labour and served to strengthen the optimism of the workers which was so marked in the early strike struggles of 1890.<sup>50</sup>

In *The Workingman's Paradise* Geisner explains to Ned

George's is a scheme by which it is proposed to make employers compete so fiercely among one another that the workman will have it all his own way. It works this way. You tax the landowner until it doesn't pay him to have unused land. He must either throw it up or get it used somehow and the demand for labour thus created is to lift wages and put the actual workers in what George evidently considers a satisfactory position. (110)

George's *Social Problems* was the second work discussed by Lane in his 'Books Well Worth Reading' series in *The Worker*.<sup>51</sup> Although he found *Progress and Poverty* 'a wearisome book for all its brilliant writing and repeated outbursts of intensest passion', and *Fretrade and Protection* 'a mere piece of special pleading', he declared that 'George is the man who, most of all the English writers – writers of English – has clothed the dry bones of political economy with the flesh of humanity and the blood of passionate sympathy.' He recommends *Social Problems*, defining its limitations at the same time that he acknowledges its propagandistic strengths.

It is readable from beginning to end. It is short. It is George at his very best, that phase of George which all who seek better things love and admire and respect. Every man and woman who can read can wade through it easily and if they do so they will feel, when they put it down, that they are better and truer and nobler than when they picked it up. George may be out on interest. He may be wrong in maintaining that population, the illimitable quantity, cannot get to the limits of land the limitable quantity. He may be not quite logical in assuming that competition is a great thing. But he is a great man and a good man and "Social Problems" is *his* book.

The last issue of *The Worker* that Lane edited, 30 July 1892, carried on its front page Karl Marx's letter of 1881 on Henry George and his theories: 'the man is a back number.' Geisner's view is similar and he explains to Ned the inadequacies of the 'Single Tax' proposal:

The capitalists, who alone can really use land remember, for the farmer, the squatter, the shopkeeper, the manufacturer, the merchant, are nowadays really only managers for banks and mortgage companies, will soon arrange a way of fixing the values of land to suit themselves. But apart from that, I object to the Single Tax idea from the social point of view. It is competitive. It means that we are still to go on buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. It

is tinged with that hideous Free Trade spirit of England, by which cotton kings became millionaires while cotton spinners were treated far worse than any chattel slaves. (111)

Lane presents the Single Taxers amongst the Sunday afternoon speakers in the Domain. There was 'a vigorous iconoclast, who from the top of a kitchen chair laid down the Law of the Universe as revealed by one Clifford' and 'a wild-eyed religionary' who had been enabled 'to foretell exactly the date of the Second Coming of Christ. Then came the Single Tax platform' (120).

It is not an utterly hostile placing. The iconoclastic puritans of the English revolution, the millenarian visionaries, were the transmitters of a radical consciousness as much as the Single Taxers. They were all progenitors of socialism.

W. K. Hancock remarked of the 1890s, 'the waters were turbulently Marxian; but Lane was at heart an English Puritan, a spiritual descendant of Winstanley and the digger-communists of seventeenth-century Sussex.'<sup>52</sup> The communism of the radicals of the English revolution (not confined to Sussex) was transmitted into the nineteenth century through radical, independent religious groups. At the Strattons, Ford tells of his childhood in the west of England and how his elder brother

took to going to the Ranters' meetings instead of to church. My mother and father used to tie him up on Saturday nights and march him to church on Sunday like a young criminal going to gaol ... It was the deadliest of all sins, you know, to go to the Ranters. (80-1)

In the end the whole family went. There is some ambiguity here, as to whether the Ranters are to be identified as Primitive Methodists, or associated with the Ranters of the English Revolution. The original Ranters were an anarcho-communist sect, adherents of the medieval doctrine of the Free Spirit. Norman Cohn has explored their European connections in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. A. L. Morton and Christopher Hill have traced their role during the English revolution, and Jack Lindsay has indicated the transmission of their beliefs into Blake's milieu.<sup>53</sup> Their beliefs were straightforward. 'The true communion amongst men is to have all things common and to call nothing one hath one's own', Abiezer Coppe wrote. God, 'that mighty Leveller' will 'overturn, overturn, overturn.' 'Who are the oppressors but the nobility and gentry?' asked Lawrence Clarkson.<sup>54</sup>

Lane continually refers back to the English revolution. The recurrent paradise image of the novel's title, with Ned as Adam, Nellie as Eve, and Geisner as Satan,

associates him with that seventeenth-century focus on Eden for radical propaganda that we find in Winstanley's *True Leveller's Standard* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the tradition of the Ranters and Blake, the conventional story is inverted. Geisner's temptation is the positive force of Socialism. As for Nellie, 'For that kiss Ned gave himself into the hands of a fanaticism, eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, striving to become as a god knowing good from evil' (100). Lane also shares the doctrine of the Norman Yoke, which Christopher Hill has shown was a central myth of the Cromwellian revolutionary period.

Before 1066 the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of this country lived as free and equal citizens, governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman Conquest deprived them of this liberty, and established the tyranny of an alien King and landlords. But the people did not forget the rights they had lost. They fought continuously to recover them.<sup>55</sup>

Writing in *The Worker* the week the shearers' strike was called off Lane declared:

Class governance is a usurpation, a tyranny which has its roots in the ages when armed robbers, military castes, ground the peaceful tillers of the soil into slavery. Our parliamentary system, of which the very opponents of one-man-one-vote profess to be so proud, is only a degenerated survival of the assembly at which in primitive times our Teutonic forefathers gathered, free and equal, to make for themselves laws for their common governance.<sup>56</sup>

John Lane recalled how William would announce 'we Germanic people came into history as Communists. From our communal village we drew the strength which broke Rome down, and the energy which even yet lets us live.'<sup>57</sup> Southern England was always thought to be more Norman than the Midlands, West and North. Lane wrote in *The Boomerang*,

Australia is not a sect or a section, it is not a caste or a class, or a creed, is not to be a Southern England nor yet another United States. Australia is the whole white people of this great continent.<sup>58</sup>

The stress on the Aryan tradition, the Germanic heritage, the Anglo-Saxon, provided, too, an ideology for the racism of the early socialists.<sup>59</sup>

Humphrey McQueen has called Lane 'a fanatical racist'.<sup>60</sup> Certainly racism is a major component of his thinking. In *The Workingman's Paradise* Nellie recalls Ned telling her that the 'squatters were mostly selfish brutes who preferred Chinese to their own colour and would stop at no trick to beat the men out of a few shillings'

(10). Lane correctly saw that the pastoralists were eager to import Chinese or kanaka indentured labour as a way of undercutting and destroying the unions. Lane's first novel, *White or Yellow? A story of the Race-war of A.D. 1908* by 'Sketcher',<sup>61</sup> predicted an alliance of the pastoralists of the Queensland establishment and Asian capital. The alliance is destroyed by white, working-class unionists taking up arms and fighting. The Chinese are driven up to the northern tip of Queensland and then deported. The economic predictions may yet come true; but over and above that there is a racism. Instead of seeing the Chinese or kanakas as equally oppressed peoples and forging an alliance with them, Lane believed that Blacks and Orientals were inferior races, decadent, doomed to extinction. Though in his pessimistic projections of industrial capitalism, he speculated that perhaps in the decadence of these last days of capitalism, the Chinese were destined to survive better than the Celtic–Saxon Aryan. Nellie speculates

this yellow man and such men as he were watching them all slowly going down lower and lower, were waiting to leap upon them in their last helplessness and enslave them all as white girls were sometimes enslaved, even already, in those filthy opium joints whose stench nauseated the hurrying passers by. Perhaps under all their meekness these Chinese were braver, more stubborn, more vigorous, and it was doomed that they should conquer at last and rule in the land where they had been treated as outcasts and intruders. (9)

Lane wrote about the opium dens and the gambling joints in his 'Daylight and Dark' series in *The Boomerang*. He tried opium and noticed that

the world seemed to move back a peg or two and that it seemed as though there was getting to be nothing but friendliness in it and that the jarrings of life were getting covered with india-rubber shields ... I noticed mostly that I began to hate less these calm-faced impassive invaders of our civilisation and to feel less intensely against their abominable habits ... And then I recollected seeing a year ago in this very same place and at much the same time of day a bloated-faced, fair-haired white girl, hardly twenty, who was lying insensate with the poppy-drug in the midst of these smooth-faced and heartless yellow men ... And then I wanted to kick the lamp over and burn down this joint and all the other joints and with it every one of these yellow devils who, with mask-like faces and fawning guise and patient, plodding ways and superb organisation, have come here and rooted themselves here and brought with them all their virtues and all their vices and who threaten us with this frightful habit which will wreck the manliness of our men and the womanliness of our women, and will bury our nationality in a deadly slough of sloth and deceit and filth and immoralities from which the vigorous white race man now shrinks in horror.<sup>62</sup>

An intractable hostility to the Chinese and to their use of opium was another feature of the American Labor movement that Lane brought with him to Australia. 'At its first meeting in 1881, the first act of the Federation of Organised Trades and Labor Unions was to condemn Chinese cigar-makers of California and to urge that only union-label cigars be bought.'<sup>63</sup> The Federation became the American Federation of Labor in 1886 and its founding president, Samuel Gompers, led the campaign against the Chinese until his death in 1924. The Chinese were seen as a threat to organised labour since they were held to work harder for longer hours at lower wages than white workers, and their opium usage was held to help them work harder for less. The labour unions' campaign against the Chinese resulted in legislation prohibiting the importing of opium by Chinese to the USA in 1887, the Chinese Exclusion Act barring the further immigration of Chinese into the USA in 1889, and the restriction of the manufacture of smoking opium to American citizens in 1890.<sup>64</sup> Concerted anti-opium campaigns, directed against the Chinese, began in Melbourne and Sydney in 1890.

When Lane established his communist settlements in Paraguay in 1893, he was adamant that there should be no contact with the native *Guarani*. Of course there was contact. When Mary Gilmore left the Cosme settlement in 1900 she explained 'ostensibly we left because of the climate, actually because (a) we feared, if not in this, in a later generation, the admixture of the native' and (b) because it was no longer operating communistically.'<sup>65</sup> The fear of interbreeding, the sex-fear is exploited by Lane in his Lucinda Sharpe column.

Lane's racism is blatant; but it is important to realise it was a racism shared widely by his fellow communists and socialists. McQueen notes:

What Lane was fond of calling 'the piebald issue' dominated the thinking of the Labor Party to such an extent that when the Objectives of the Federal Labor Party were adopted in 1905:

the cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community took precedence over:

the securing of the full results of their industry to all producers by the collective ownership of monopolies and the extension of the industrial and economic functions of the state and the municipality.

In other words, the Labor Party was racist before it was socialist.<sup>66</sup>

In this context it is a mistake to see Lane as in any way exceptional in his racism.

It is a contradiction that was endemic to the labour movement. Lane recognised the economic advantages to the capitalists in using cheap coloured labour; he failed to realise that a racist response merely supported the capitalists in dividing the working classes.

In 1887, Ernie Lane recalled,

My brother started a Bellamy society. *Looking Backward* was just then in the boom. We met regularly on the closed-in balcony of George Marchant's hop beer factory in Bowen Street [Brisbane], and there were about a dozen of us used to attend.<sup>67</sup>

Lane began serialising Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1887) in the first issue of *The Worker*,<sup>68</sup> and he discussed it in the first of his 'Books Well Worth Reading' series in the same issue. 'It has won rich men to the side of State Socialism, and has moved the masses as no book dealing with political-economic topics ever moved them before,' Lane wrote.<sup>69</sup> Bellamy's vision of the year AD 2000 was one of 'all change.'

Industry has readjusted itself to the age of machinery; competition has been swept away by natural process; the state has absorbed all the means of production and distribution; equality of wealth reigns supreme, and in this equality individualism finds unlimited scope, and the ablest lead, and the weak are happy with the strong. Woman, too, has won her equality, and shares fully with man in the abounding wealth and marvellous opportunities of a great community, where all are workers, and where no man robs another, where crime is unknown and immorality unthought of, where the dreaming of the good and great is realised at last ...<sup>70</sup>

An immensely influential work for the labour movement, Bellamy's novel lies behind the portrayal of Australia in *The Workingman's Paradise*. Sydney in its slums, its poverty, its inequalities and its exploitation is the counter-type of Bellamy's utopian city.

Bellamy's industrial army of socialism may have been in the background of the New Australia movement. The first issue of the journal, *New Australia*, asked

#### DO YOU BELIEVE

That there is intelligence enough and power of organisation enough among the workers to enable them of their own free will to organise the present conditions of industry and to give the world an example of a peaceful and *self-sustaining* industrial community in which there are none but workers, in which all are equal?

IF YOU DO, JOIN THE 'NEW AUSTRALIA' MOVEMENT.<sup>71</sup>

But the industrial model was never developed in the Paraguayan settlements of New Australia or Colonia Cosme. 'Socialists whose conception of the truer life is a *Looking Backward* city have no place with us,' John Lane wrote in 1900.<sup>72</sup> *Cosme Monthly* declared 'The life within reach of our outstretched hands is the heaven of which William Morris dreamed and Sir Thomas More saw afar off.'<sup>73</sup>

*Looking Backward* postulated that socialism would be established with absolutely no violence, by the natural process of take-overs and monopolisation, culminating in one big, state monopoly. The final episode appeared in *The Worker* for 27 December 1890. The next issue, 10 January 1891, carried the first reports of the beginnings of the shearers' strike. Events undercut Bellamy's theory of social change. The defeat of the maritime strike of 1890 and of the shearers' strike of 1891 made it quite clear to Lane that monopoly capital was not going to happily surrender its power and wealth to a socialist ideal. In his earlier political writings he had preached moderation and co-operation;<sup>74</sup> but it became clearer than ever before, that any thought of co-operation now with capital was absurd. Lane introduces into his novel the 'managing director of the Great Southern Mortgage Agency, a big concern that owns hundreds and hundreds of stations. At least, the squatters own the stations and the Agency owns the squatters, and he as good as owns the Agency' (26). Historians have calculated that by 1890 about half the pastoralists of New South Wales were mortgaged clients of banks or other financing agencies.<sup>75</sup> Strong, the managing director, 'is Capitalism personified' (207). His encounter with Ned at the novel's end is a precursor of Wickson's encounter with Ernest Everhard in Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1907) and of Winston's encounter with O'Brien in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949).<sup>76</sup> Strong sums up the unrelenting, unbending attitude of capital, the imperative of *power*:

'Rich!' sneered Strong. 'What is rich? It is Power that is worth having and to have power one must control capital. In your wildest ranting of the power of the capitalist you have hardly touched the fringe of the power he has.' (204)

Ned initially has had a sort of admiration for the abstemious, disciplined Strong. He even shakes hands with Strong after the encounter as they both declare 'war' (205). But any sentimentalism about Strong as the noble gentleman warrior is immediately dispelled as Strong, having shaken Ned's hand, sends a coded telegram to arrange for Ned's arrest on his way back to Queensland. Power, not honour, is



Strong's characteristic.

Bellamy, rejecting violent revolution, argued that the nineteenth-century anarchists 'were paid by the great monopolies to wave the red flag and talk about burning, sacking, and blowing people up, in order, by alarming the timid, to head off any real reforms.'<sup>77</sup> Lane was to have his own experience of agents-provocateurs in Paraguay; they were not a concept foreign to his world. But he rejects utterly Bellamy's identifying the anarchists with the instruments of repression. Nellie introduces Ned to the amiable anarchist Sim, one of 'the dynamiters' (40) as she calls him, at Paddy's Market. Sim announces, 'Jones vows that there is only one way to cure things and that is to destroy the rule of Force' (41). Ned's education is continued by Geisner: "The Anarchist ideal is the highest and noblest of all human ideals ... Anarchical Communism, that is men working as mates and sharing with one another of their own free will, is the highest conceivable form of Socialism in industry." (112) Though Geisner himself is not an anarchist but a communist. He explains

I freely admit it is the only form of Socialism possible among true Socialists. But the world is full of mentally and morally and socially diseased people who, I believe, must go through the school of State Socialism before, as a great mass, they are true Socialists and fit for voluntary Socialism. Unionism is the drill for Socialism and Socialism is the drill for Anarchy and Anarchy is that free ground whereon true Socialists and true Individualists meet as friends and mates, all enmity between them absorbed by the development of an all-dominant Humanity. (112–13)

Geisner recognises the idealism of the anarchists. But his own programme is a conventional communist programme, accepting the necessity for the period of state socialism, the transitional stage before the withering away of the state.

The extent of Lane's knowledge of and commitment to Marxism has always been a matter of dispute. As Lloyd Ross remarked, 'Considerable time could be spent in showing the contradictory views held by Lane at different times on the reforms to be advocated and in showing the inconsistency between his Socialistic drive and his immediate steps.'<sup>78</sup> A. St Ledger, a Queensland senator, had no doubt about Lane's revolutionary Marxism: in *The Worker* leaders Lane 'endorsed all that Karl Marx had written against capitalism',<sup>79</sup> St Ledger wrote in 1909. 'The A.L.F. under his guidance founded a library of Socialistic literature, in which Bellamy and Marx were the Bible and Shakespeare to its new recruits. Thousands of leaflets were

distributed to all its branches.<sup>80</sup> Lloyd Ross argued that ‘Marx certainly influenced him less than had Bellamy.’<sup>81</sup> Henry Mayer mentions Lane only in passing, as a teetotaler, in *Marx, Engels and Australia*.<sup>82</sup> Bruce Mansfield does not mention Lane in ‘The Socialism of William Morris: England and Australia.’<sup>83</sup> Grant Hannan<sup>84</sup> and Humphrey McQueen<sup>85</sup> have denied that he was a Marxist at all.

Lane discussed Marx in his *Worker* series, ‘Books Well Worth Reading.’

Karl Marx is the father of modern Socialism, that is to say he is the man who in his famous work “Das Kapital” first systematised into the nationalisation of land and machinery the previously crude theories that somehow or other every man must get what he produces in order to be not a slave. He reaches the bed-rock principle that “interest is usury and usury is robbery” and propounds in scientific and convincing method the economic truths which now begin to win recognition throughout the civilised world. For we workers are all Socialists nowadays, though some of us are so ignorant that we don’t know it. We follow Marx in the contention that Labour’s rightful share of Production is *all*.

But Marx is a recondite writer, a man who reasons algebraically and with pitiless disregard for the dryness of mathematical demonstration.<sup>86</sup>

The difficulty of Marx’s work meant that ‘to the every day man, Marx is unreadable.’ For the immediate propagandist work of converting the union movement to socialism, Lane had found the works of Bellamy and Henry George more accessible: Bellamy, George and Olive Schreiner were discussed in ‘Books Well Worth Reading’ before Marx. Moreover, copies of *Capital* were hard to acquire, ‘so, very few have got copies and it is very dear’; neither *The Boomerang* nor the *The Bulletin* could direct Twomey, a Charters Towers radical, to a copy when he enquired. Though he did acquire a copy – as did Queensland premier Griffith and *Worker* secretary Seymour. Lane remarked, ‘There are probably others in Queensland but not many, though with Socialism becoming fashionable it may soon expect to be bought for ornament if not for use. I doubt if there are a thousand men who have Marx at their finger’s ends in the whole world.’ But though like William Morris, Lane stressed the difficulty of reading Marx, he also, like Morris, recognised that *Capital* was the basic text of socialism. He wrote in his ‘Books Well Worth Reading’ article on Marx:

Yet Marx sways the world. From his epoch-making work all modern economic writers draw as from a well of learning, pure and undefiled. There, “Das Kapital” – “Capital” – is laid out on the dissecting table of enquiry; its very marrow is laid bare by his piercing intellect. From the time when he

safely gave his two immortal volumes to the thinkers the cause of the toilers was won. With the divinity stripped off that had cloaked “Property”, with the brand of theft stamped indelibly upon the exactions of Capitalism, with Labour set up on high as the sole producer of all the wealth which was and is and can be, and all done with the cold logic of a matchless logician – it was only a question of years till to the masses below the truths acquired by the genius on the mountain tops would waft slowly down. It is mainly because of Marx that the world sees its way to a remedy for the social ills that oppress us – and Marx, *also*, was a Jew.

Lane was also in communication with the Morris circle. John Lane recalls

One of the most highly-placed educationalists then in Queensland was a friend and correspondent of William Morris, the English socialist, poet, and reformer. He used to meet Lane in secret, and with him discuss politics and literature.<sup>87</sup>

Another contact was A. G. Yewen, as E. H. Lane recalls:

A personal friend of William Morris, Yewen assisted him to form the Socialist League (1884) in a breakaway from the S.D.F. [Social Democratic Federation], whose high priest was H. M. Hyndman ... Owing to ill health Yewen was ordered to go to Australia. He had a letter to W. Lane in Brisbane and Will sent him up to Umbiram, Darling Downs, where my brother John was school teacher. Yewen stayed with John for six months and in improved health, went to Sydney. There he threw himself into the work of the Australian Socialist League, of which McNamara was secretary.<sup>88</sup>

Yewen, W. A. Holman and Henry Lawson later got painting work in Sydney through another former member of the S.D.F., G. Chandler.<sup>89</sup>

Marxist ideas were current. The English socialist writer, Francis Adams, a friend of Lane's in Brisbane, addressed a sonnet to Marx: ‘We praise you, worker, thinker, poet, seer!’ And Lane persuaded Sir Samuel Griffith,<sup>90</sup> the then premier of Queensland, to contribute to the Christmas 1888 issue of *The Boomerang*. Griffith wrote an exposition of Marx's theory of surplus value. ‘There are only two sources of wealth; the gifts or products of nature and human labour’, Griffith began.

In order that additional wealth of capital might come into existence, labor must be applied to raw material in such a manner that the value of the resulting product is greater than the value of the raw material together with that of the things consumed in the process of production ... Such new value created should, however, belong not to the employer nor to the owner of the raw material, but to the labourer himself. In practice, the employer expropriated a

large proportion of the new value created; hence arises the unequal distribution of wealth within the community.<sup>91</sup>

In *The Workingman's Paradise* Geisner explains to Ned how the employer expropriates the new value created. The worker

must bargain for the owner of machinery to take the product of his labour for a certain price which of course isn't its full value at all but the price at which, owing to his necessities, he is compelled to sell his labour. (107)<sup>92</sup>

And, as Marx points out in *Capital*:

The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the labourer alive during 24 hours, does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. Therefore, the value of labour-power, and the value which that labour-power creates in the labour process, are two entirely different magnitudes: and this difference of the two values was what the capitalist had in view, when he was purchasing the labour-power ... The seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realises its exchange-value, and parts with its use-value. He cannot take the one without giving the other ... The owner of the money has paid the value of a day's labour power; his, therefore, is the use of it for a day; a day's labour belongs to him ... The daily sustenance of labour-power costs only half a day's labour, while on the other hand the very same labour-power can work during a whole day ... consequently the value which its use during one day creates, is double what he pays for that use.<sup>93</sup>

A reading of *The Workingman's Paradise* in the context of *Capital* and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* indicates the extent to which Lane used his novel to expound some of the basic principles of Marxism. Geisner explains to Ned that unionism is no answer to the system.

How can you get what you want by unionism? The evil is in having to ask another man for work at all – in not being able to work for yourself. Unionism, so far, only says that if this other man does employ you he shall not take advantage of your necessity by paying you less than the wage which you and your fellow workmen have agreed to hold out for. You must destroy the system which makes it necessary for you to work for the profit of another man, and keeps you idle when he can't get a profit out of you. The whole wage system must be utterly done away with. (108)

*The Communist Manifesto* is in the background here:

The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage

labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers.<sup>94</sup>

Competition amongst wage labourers is inevitable under the capitalist system. Geisner points out

The fits of industrial briskness and idleness which occur in all countries are enough to account for the continual tendency of wages [to keep] to a bare living amount for those working, as many of those not working stand hungrily by to jump into their places if they get rebellious or attempt to prevent wages going down. (108)<sup>95</sup>

These 'fits' are the 'epidemic of overproduction' as the *Manifesto* calls them.<sup>96</sup> Engels explains them in *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*.

Since 1825, when the first general crisis erupted, the whole industrial and commercial world, production and exchange among all civilised peoples and their more or less barbarian appendages, have broken down about once every ten years. Trade comes to a standstill, markets are glutted, products lie around in piles as massive as they are unsaleable, hard cash disappears, credit vanishes, factories are idle, the working masses lack the means of subsistence because they have produced too much of them, bankruptcy follows upon bankruptcy, forced sale upon forced sale.<sup>97</sup>

From the increasing pool of the unemployed, strike-breakers and non-union labour are recruited by the Queensland pastoralists. Nellie reflects on how 'the scum of southern towns and the sifted blacklegs of southern "estates" were to be drafted in hordes to Queensland to break down the unionism that alone protected the bushman.' (132) The *Manifesto* has already provided the analysis of this process, together with the term 'scum':

The 'dangerous class', the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigues.<sup>98</sup>

Lane presents such a 'bribed tool of reactionary intrigue' in the anonymous 'burly man of unmistakably bush appearance, modified both in voice and dress by considerable contact with the towns' (195). Strong hires him to 'start another union against the present one' (196) – a tactic the pastoralists did indeed employ, just as the CIA did fifty years later.<sup>99</sup> Lane's suspicion of the urban proletariat and lumpenproletariat and his preference for the bushmen had its Marxian analysis behind it.

Geisner elucidates the developing monopoly stage of capitalism. 'It takes more and more capital for a man to start for himself. This is a necessary result of increasing mechanical powers and of the economy of big businesses as compared to small ones' (107). As the *Manifesto* put it

The lower strata of the middle class ... sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production.<sup>100</sup>

Geisner explains the proletarianisation of the lower middle classes to Ned: 'more and more go round asking for work as what we call civilisation progresses, that is as population increases and the industrial life becomes more complicated ... This system operates for the extension of its own worst feature, the degradation of the working masses' (107).

It is not only in Geisner's dialogue with Ned that Marxism is expounded. The language of a Marxist mode of thinking runs through the novel – capital, capitalists, working masses, labour, even scum. And the *leitmotiv* of prostitution has its specific Marxist resonance. Marx concluded Volume I of *Capital* with an examination of 'The Modern Theory of Colonisation'. Prostitution is specified as one of the direct consequences of the capitalist exploitation of Australia.

The shameless lavishing of uncultivated colonial land on aristocrats and capitalists by the Government, so loudly denounced even by Wakefield, has produced, especially in Australia, in conjunction with the stream of men that the gold-diggings attract, and with the competition that the importation of English commodities causes even to the smallest artisan, an ample 'relative surplus labouring population', so that almost every mail brings the Job's news of a 'glut of the Australian labour-market', and prostitution in some places there flourishes as wantonly as in the London Haymarket.<sup>101</sup>

When Nellie takes Ned around Sydney they encounter the prostitutes near Town Hall, the recognised beat in the 1890s: 'the sad sisterhood were out in force where the bright gas-jets of the better-class shops illuminated the pavement, swaggering it mostly where the kerbs were lined with young fellows' (39).

This realistic observation also has its iconographical significance. The *Communist Manifesto* declares

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.<sup>102</sup>

It is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e. of prostitution both public and private.<sup>103</sup>

Prostitution turns up metaphorically at the Strattons in a discussion of journalism under capitalism. “Why, we’re nothing but literary prostitutes,” said George, energetically. “We just write now what we’re told, selling our brains as women on the streets do their bodies” (87). It is a traditional analogy, but it takes on a force here from the literal prostitution shown before and after the Stratton episode. On the way back from the Strattons there is the episode in which Nellie ‘kissed the sleeping harlot on the cheek’ (100). The Victorian fear that venereal diseases were transmitted by such contact as kissing provides the frisson of horror here for Nellie’s gesture. Later, in Nellie’s account of the fate of her sister, prostitution is never named but it is implied throughout the story. This episode, ‘Nellie’s Sister’, appeared separately, before book publication, in the Christmas issue of *The Worker* for 1891.<sup>104</sup> Part of a realistic portrayal of urban life, prostitution, as the stress on it in the *Communist Manifesto* makes clear, is one of the central expressive emblems of industrial capitalist society.

Lane was one of the major advocates of women’s rights in the Australian labour movement, and one of those pressing for womanhood suffrage. He wrote a weekly letter in *The Boomerang* and later in *The Worker* about women’s issues, under the name of ‘Lucinda Sharpe’, supposedly an American woman resident in Queensland. He adopted the pseudonym ‘A Mother of the People’ in *The Worker* and *New Australia*. These female impersonations have led P. J. Bruce to speculate on Lane’s ‘androgynous nature’, and he notes, too, the recurrence of the ‘idealised mother figure’ in Lane’s writings.<sup>105</sup> But Freudian interpretations cannot depoliticise Lane’s radical vision. Geisner tells Ned of the

two great reforms which must come if Humanity is to progress. ... One reform is the Reorganisation of Industry. The other is the Recognition of Woman’s Equality. These two are the practical steps by which we move up to the socialistic idea. (123)

The women's issue is of central significance in *The Workingman's Paradise*. As Geisner stresses, it is a practical and a political issue. Nellie expounds the women's movement at the Strattons. The tour she gives Ned is one that emphasises the situation of women – the struggle of the housewife and the mother in the slums, the exploitation of women workers in the garment trade, in restaurants, and in prostitution. Lane is in advance of most of his contemporaries in his awareness of and stress on the women's issue. And he recognises that it was for women to determine their future role in society, not for men to interfere yet again. As Nellie points out “‘What women really want is to be left to find their own sphere, for whenever a man starts to find it for them he always manages to find something else ... You can't raise free men from slave women.’” (72–3). And just as she educates Ned in socialism, so she educates him in the women's movement, so that he ‘began to dimly understand how it touched the Labour movement’ (75). It is in the combination of the reorganisation of industry and the women's movement that Lane sees the achievement of socialism. It is a radical, working-class women's movement that Lane stresses, a women's movement committed to the socialist ideal.

As the ‘Leading Australian Woman Critic’ who reviewed the novel for *The Worker* stressed,

The author has recognised the fact that in woman's pulse throbs the secret of a nation's redemption or its degradation and his book, man-written though it be, is essentially a woman's book proclaiming aloud the gospel of redemption for her who shall thereby redeem the world.

And it is to women that the book will chiefly appeal. There are magnificent passages in it which will wring every fibre of a true woman's nature; passages where the writer plays on the chords of slumbering maternity with the touch of inspired genius, where he reveals to woman her own love-nature and love-power as she herself seldom sees it.<sup>106</sup>

And the revolution? Lane was writing his novel after the defeat of the unions, the gaoling of strike leaders, and the mobilisation of troops. The expression of revolutionary sentiments had to be carefully done. But revolution was what Lane expressed. Geisner warns Ned

there are two Socialisms. There is a socialism with a little ‘s’ which is simply an attempt to stave off the true Socialism. This small, narrow socialism means only the state regulation of the distribution of wealth. It has as its advocates politicians who seek to modify the robbery of the workers, to ameliorate the



horrors of the competitive system, only in order to prevent the upheaval which such men recognise to be inevitable if things keep on unchanged. (114)

Ned pledges 'to be a Socialist of the right sort' and Geisner continues:

'It can only come by the utter sweeping away of competition, and that can only come by the development of the socialistic idea in men's hearts ... Year after year the number of men and women who hold Socialism as a religion is growing. And when they are enough you will see this Old Order melt away like a dream and the New Order replace it. That which appears so impregnable will pass away in a moment. So?' He blew a cloud of smoke and watched it disappear circling upwards. (115–16)

The puff of smoke illustrating the classic Marxist spiral ascent suggests the ease of the melting away; but it suggests too the smoke of gunfire. And when Geisner talks of the role of the unions, it is in military terms: 'drill, organisation, drill' (117).

Lane's position on armed revolution has been misrepresented by historians. McQueen, having noted that 'Lane's *Boomerang* was often criticised for its militaristic utterances by the Sydney anarchist S. A. Rosa',<sup>107</sup> nonetheless later refers to Lane's 'rejection of violence.'<sup>108</sup> McQueen selectively quotes from Lane's *Worker* editorial at the height of the shearers' strike: 'tolerate still, not because rebellion, i.e. armed resistance to established authority is wrong ... but because we should endure to the utmost for the sake of humanity which shrinks from violence.'<sup>109</sup> But Lane's editorial continued:

but because we should endure to the utmost for the sake of the Humanity which shrinks from violence even against the violators of human rights and which realises all the horrors and misery of civil war, and which sees how our real enemies the *absentee* capitalists – escape mostly while those who have wronged us ignorantly or by compulsion suffer, with ourselves, the most. Once let us win a fair franchise, once let the bushmen march up with us all to the ballot-box, once let the plural vote and the revision-trick be abolished, and there will be none to blame but ourselves if the Law is wrong ... And if they persistently refuse the ballot to us as they have persistently refused it in the past: if Parliament refuses to do us justice and scorns our demand to be made full citizens; then we shall have full justification for any action we may adopt, even if that action is revolution.<sup>110</sup>

And making the point quite clear, he stressed 'A Tyranny has no claim upon us but that we should resist it.' The editorial concludes, 'Those have rights who dare maintain them – they alone, and none others.'

Lane at no point rejects the use of force. But force for him is a last resort. Bloodshed is no proof of ideological correctness. The real enemy – the absentee capitalists, for instance – are not the ones who suffer the most in any violence. Peaceful means of change are always preferable to violent means. And if violent means are used, they must be successful; an unsuccessful revolution is counter-revolutionary. In March 1891 ‘there were 29 officers and 509 men based at Barcaldine, with a nine-pounder and a Nordenfeld gun in the middle of the Barcaldine encampment.’<sup>111</sup> For Lane to have recommended violence at this point would have been suicidal. The shearers were not adequately armed. They were not ideologically organised. Lane was concerned to avoid provocation that could lead to the excuse for a judicial massacre on the United States’ model. ‘They’d like nothing better than a chance to shoot a mob of us down like wild turkeys’, Ned says (147).

The strike collapsed in June. In a *Worker* editorial in October Lane brooded on the situation, repeating the conclusion of his March editorial.

Once or twice, in these columns, I have alluded to the inevitable necessity for violent reform where peaceful efforts to secure what is just and right are ignored and derided and suppressed by the brutal Force of class governments. I have said, as I say now and at all times, that a time always arrives, sooner or later, where tolerance of Wrong becomes itself a Wrong, and where those alone have rights who dare to maintain them. For this, it is alleged that the WORKER preaches sedition, as if one had to preach submission to oppression and injustice in order to be law-abiding.<sup>112</sup>

A time always arrives. He expected it within thirty years. The interim was to be used preparing for it.

His early beliefs in class collaboration had vanished by the time of the shearers’ strike. He saw the class war in these confrontations. And it is not the class struggle, as many Marxists phrased it, but class war. Ned says to Strong “‘There is war between us, only I think it possible to be a little civilised and not to fight each other like savages as we are doing’” (200). By the novel’s end, the pretences of civilisation are dropped in Ned’s vision of Apocalypse.

All the world over it was the same, two great ideas were crystallising, two great parties were forming, the lists were being cleared by combats such as this for the ultimate death-struggle between two great principles which could not always exist side by side. The robbed were beginning to understand the robbery;

the workers were beginning to turn upon the drones; the dominance of the squatter, the mine-owner, the ship-owner, the land-owner, the shareholder, was being challenged; this was not the end, but surely it was the beginning of the end. (221)

On the last page he talks of 'these later days' and the new Messiah of the Apocalypse (225).

His stress is on the achieved good society, not on the violence to be gone through to reach it. He accepts that a violent confrontation will occur but until the appropriate time any confrontation would be adventurism. In the interim there is the battle of ideas, the need to reveal the truth of communism to the world, to workers and bourgeoisie alike. In New Australia he would train the consciousness of a socialist army, and propaganda would be disseminated round the world. And perhaps a change of consciousness could avert the need for a violent confrontation; or at least make the inevitable socialist victory quick and overwhelming. When he took a strong, militarist anti-German line in World War I he was not in conflict with his earlier principles. Militarism, like racism, was never rejected in Lane's socialism.

How militant were the striking shearers? At the beginning of the novel Ned's unionism is naive, unpolitical. On his return to Sydney after the maritime strike he stresses to Nellie that the 'responsible' unionists who went round 'talking law and order to the chaps on strike and rounding on every man who even boo'd as though he were a blackleg' have realised the way they were co-opted and used by the 'authorities.'

The man who told me vowed it would be a long time before he'd do policeman's work again. He said that for him Government might keep its own order and see how soon it got tired of it. (144)

The voices preaching moderation are introduced by Lane only to be discounted, to show how they had been used. 'Do you think there will be any trouble?' Nellie asks as the shearers' strike begins its slow start.

'Honestly, I don't, Nellie. At least nothing serious. Some of the fellows may start to buck if the Government does try to break up the camps and it might spread a little, but there are no guns and so I don't see how it could. There seems to be a lot of talk everywhere but that's hard fact. Ten thousand bushmen with rifles wouldn't have much trouble with the Government and the Government wouldn't have much trouble with ten thousand bushmen without rifles.' (146-7)

But it is a confrontation situation. Nellie, daughter of a selector, a subsistence farmer, reflects with anger 'the companions of her childhood were to be Gatling-gunned because of the squatters' (132).

The gunning down is all threatened from the squatters, the military and the 'special constables'. Lane had good reason for playing down any armed militancy of the shearers now that the strike had ended. Twelve leaders had been gaoled, but the Brisbane *Telegraph* complained 'it was worthless for the Government to arrest strike criminals when it was Lane who was the real criminal.' 'The Man Behind the Curtain' it called him.<sup>113</sup> The *Courier* alleged of the strike that

The details had all been considered and arranged not by the ignorant men now languishing in gaol, but by wiser men, of whom the chief plotter is a resident in Brisbane. His plans were at one time on paper, and possibly might have been secured; but it is certain that since the arrest of the first conspirators in Barcardine they existed in black and white no longer. It was the rash precipitancy of these bush leaders which brought to confusion the carefully-planned scheme of the arch-conspirator in Brisbane.<sup>114</sup>

W. T. Stead called Lane 'The most dangerous man in Queensland'. 'In Australia', a Victorian Cabinet Minister corrected.<sup>115</sup>

Ned sets off for Queensland at the end of the novel and is clearly going to be one of those gaoled. But the movement of the book suggests that gaoling will only raise his militancy. What was the next stage?

The unions were desperately weakened by the loss of the strike. Kenway points out that 'the convictions for conspiracy removed from active life for over two years almost all the executive members of the Q.L.U. and the Q.S.U.' and that 'the cost to the unions of the 1891 strike was reckoned at £22,228, not including salaries.'<sup>116</sup> The labour movement was preparing to move into parliamentary action. Lane correctly predicted that this would lead only to co-option and corruption. But the time was not yet ripe for revolution. He proposed to continue the strike by draining off the best bushmen to a communist settlement, New Australia, and land was acquired in Paraguay. Ernie Lane stresses

It was not merely an isolated Communist settlement in the depths of a Paraguayan forest that Will was visioning, but something far more ambitious and far-reaching. Talking to me of what the future might hold, he foresaw New Australia within 30 years from its establishment, a powerful Communist State, with a disciplined army of many thousands of Communists. 'The world, then,'

he exclaimed, 'will be ripe for Communism. The workers in all lands will be ready to revolt and only awaiting the match that will set ablaze the crumbling world of capitalism. What is there to prevent us – Communists who are living proof of our Communist faith – coming forth and starting the world revolution that must inevitably come. We will write the future history of humanity on the rocks of the Andes!'<sup>117</sup>

The Association agreed with the Paraguayan government to settle 400 families within two years, 800 within four.<sup>118</sup> 'In 1894 there should be fully a thousand people in the settlement.'<sup>119</sup> The first issue of *New Australia* considered the effect of 5–6,000 workers joining the movement,<sup>120</sup> arguing that since most of them did not have votes and they were spread over five or six colonies, the emigration would not seriously affect the electoral chances of the emerging parliamentary labour movement. The advertisement in the hardback edition of *The Workingman's Paradise* talked of acquiring land 'sufficient to carry 50,000 people' (78): 50,000 was *The Worker's* estimate of the unemployed in Australia.<sup>121</sup> As Lane predicted, within thirty years there was a revolutionary situation – in 1917 in Russia. But New Australia had not survived.

It is important to stress that Lane's scheme was not a utopian retreat, but an attempt to produce a vanguard for the revolution.<sup>122</sup> Geisner outlines the scheme to Ned in *The Workingman's Paradise*. Socialism needs the 'right conditions' away from the corruptions and subversions of industrial capitalism.

Absolute isolation while the new conditions are being established; colonists who are rough and ready and accustomed to such work and at the same time are thoroughly saturated with Socialism; men accustomed to discuss and argue and at the same time drilled to abide, where necessary, by a majority decision. (118)

And expounding New Australia, Lane wrote

Our argument must be that if Socialism is shown to be practicable and if an energetic state springs up on sound lines, it will set such an example and excite such determination in other states that a world revolution will be speedily brought about. We can get together men who are what the average men of hundreds of years hence will be, and, with the organisation and the discipline, will be able to render possible a genuinely democratic and co-operative community.<sup>123</sup>

'We must first show that Socialism is possible' were Geisner's words to Mrs Stratton, she tells Ned at the end of the novel (211). The military discipline, drill and organisation are unmistakable. Lane's vision of world revolution springing from South America prefigures Che Guevara's.

Geisner presents the idea of the New Australia movement as a future strategy. New Australia is not named specifically, but an advertisement in the bound edition of *The Workingman's Paradise* announced a continuation of the novel, *In New Australia: Being Nellie Lawton's Diary of a Happier Life*. It was to follow through the story of Nellie and Ned and 'deal with the scheme for complete co-operation, on which the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association is based' (78). George Reeve recalled

I have been told by a well-known writer who was at one time schoolmistress at Cosme, that the continuation of *The Workingman's Paradise* was actually written, but when it was submitted to her to pass opinion on, the abandonment of its publication was argued, as it was considered "washy", with no virile touch to the characters therein depicted, and lacking all the fire of the founder's old-time burning enthusiasm and glowing language.<sup>124</sup>

Mary Gilmore, the writer in question, replied:

In regard to the continuation of *The Workingman's Paradise* the chapters of the book begun in Paraguay did not relate to that at all [i.e. the expulsions and the split in the settlement]. The work did not strike me as "washy" (to use Mr Reeve's word), but thin and indicative of the low state of health in which Mr Lane then was. He was still weak and bloodless from an illness that all but killed him, and in no condition to write. As he grew stronger he took his share in the colony work, and there was no time to write, even if bodily fatigue allowed it.<sup>125</sup>

William Wood wrote to George Reeve from Cosme, 3 June 1926, 'Two chapters of the book of *The Happier Life in New Australia* were read out at Sunday night meetings at Cosme at the end of the year 1895 ... I heard nothing further about it ...'<sup>126</sup>

The New Australia pioneers planned to leave for Paraguay on 1 May 1893, May Day, and the anniversary of the beginning of the 1891 Rockhampton conspiracy trial. The New South Wales government harassed and obstructed them in order to drain the Association's cash resources, the assembled pioneers had to be housed in Balmain, and it was not until 16 July 1893 that the *Royal Tar* sailed with 220 colonists and their children. One of the articles of the association was that the settlement should be teetotal. As soon as South America was reached, a group of 'rebels' persisted in drinking and challenging Lane as chairman. One of them, believed to have been a special constable during the shearers' strike, was suspected

of having joined the movement in order to split it.<sup>127</sup> When Lane expelled him and two others, 81 men, women and children left after them. The pioneers were split before the second boatload arrived; when they arrived, a further 200 of them, there were further dissensions, and in May 1894 Lane and fifty-seven followers left New Australia to establish Colonia Cosme on a separate site, some forty-five miles south.

Cosme is a Commonhold of English speaking whites, who accept among their principles Life marriage, Teetotalism and the Color Line. And who believe that Communism is not merely expedient but is right.<sup>128</sup>

In 1896 Lane sailed to England to try and recruit new members for Colonia Cosme. The March 1897 issue of *Cosme Monthly* was printed in London to help with the recruiting drive and, it announced

Since February 1st, lectures on Cosme have been given in Scotland at Paisley, Glasgow, Bridge of Weir, Cambuslang, Clydebank, Galashiels, Edinburgh, Musselburgh, and Larbert; and in England at Bradford, Rochdale, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Blackburn, Bolton, Halifax, Long Eaton, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Portsmouth, Reading, Birmingham, London, and St. Leonards. These have generally been under the auspices of the local I.L.P. or Labour Church branches, but occasionally by the arrangement of private friends.

Lane stayed in Britain until February 1898, but the recruiting was not a success; few responded to the call, and of those who did, few stayed in Cosme. In May 1899 Lane announced he was not standing for further office and in August he left Paraguay for Auckland. He worked on the *New Zealand Herald*, returned to Australia as the first full-time editor of the Sydney *Worker*, but after three months resigned and was back with the *New Zealand Herald* by June 1900. As leader writer and finally chief editor, he continued to have a wide following. The popularity of his articles

is made manifest by the almost universal demand for their republication as soon as it was known that their author, the late William Lane, had laid down forever the pen which in life he had wielded so well.

So ran the introductory note to the posthumous *Selections from the Writings of "Tohunga" (William Lane)*, published in Auckland in 1917 by Wilson and Horton.

Lane was an activist, an organiser, but he was also a thinker, a theoretician. He tested his ideas in practice. But until the revolutionary moment came, it was the war

of ideas that engaged him. The major stress of *The Workingman's Paradise* is on the power of ideas, the necessity for a consciousness change. Connie Stratton tells Ned at the end of the novel how Geisner 'is moulding the world as a potter moulds clay' (211). She sees evidence of his ideas taking effect everywhere. Like William Morris, Lane believed in the communist aim of reintegrating man to wholeness, resisting the separating and fragmenting forces of industrial capitalist specialisation. He was a journalist who had also worked as copy-boy, printer's devil and compositor. In 1890 he dropped his salary from £12 a week to £3 when he became editor of the new *Worker*. 'An editor who wouldn't give up a lot to push the Cause can't think much of it', Ford says in *The Workingman's Paradise* (87). It was no narrow cause. Lane's radicalism was a broad humanising force. Literature was a weapon in the struggle. At the same time, writing was something that demanded its own commitment from Lane. Whatever the vicissitudes of his career and the changes in his political commitments, he always wrote. He continued to write fiction in Paraguay; at least part of *The Happier Life* was written and according to William Wood he also 'started another work on Cosme to be called 'The King's Quest.'<sup>129</sup> Neither is known to have survived.

The New Australia movement had its journal from 19 November 1892. Colonia Cosme established *Cosme Monthly* in January 1895; initially handwritten and duplicated, from April 1897 it was printed on the colony's own press. A large part of the surplus went in printing and in mailing the journal to other communes and to communist and socialist journals and friends throughout the world.<sup>130</sup> The Paraguayan experiments were enacted socialism; their journals gave the necessary commentary, interpretation and theoretical component. *Cosme Monthly* ceased to be issued regularly in 1904, declaring:

had the money, time, thought and brains which have been expended on the paper during its ten years of life been put into the acquisition and care of a herd of cattle, we should now be in a very much better material position than we now occupy.<sup>131</sup>

But the thinking, the writing, the mail network were central to Lane's purpose. His essays appeared regularly in *Cosme Monthly*, and he had sent several 'John Miller' articles to *Seed Time*, the English journal of the American Fellowship of the New Life organisation dedicated to 'the reconstruction of society.' When he announced



that he would not seek any re-election for any further office, 'W. Lane said that "apart from health reasons which alone were more than sufficient", he wished to become entirely free to propagandise.'<sup>132</sup> He returned to a public forum again – a large circulation paper, not the newsletter of a commune of a handful of people.

Always the writer, Lane spread his range of contacts into the literary-artistic world as well as the political. *The Boomerang* ran a regular column called 'Bohemia' which kept up with theatrical news and gossip. Bohemia was always a part of Lane's world, and Australia had its well-established Bohemian milieux. John Sibbald, who went to New Australia with Lane, recalled that he was

essentially a Bohemian, to whom a fixed residence and domesticity are distasteful, and who contemns on principle all those attentions to material amelioration which result in what we call comfort.<sup>133</sup>

Julian Ashton, the Sydney painter, recalled

On many occasions [Lane] came to my studio and limped up and down talking about the wrongs under which mankind lived; for he was an idealist, but unlike most idealists he was reasonable and logical.<sup>134</sup>

In *The Workingman's Paradise* the Strattons are the focus of Lane's Bohemian world. According to Harry Taylor, who went with Lane to Paraguay, they were based on Agnes Rose-Soley and her husband, and 'the scene of one of the principal chapters of the book is laid in her house.'<sup>135</sup> Agnes Rose-Soley was born in Scotland, educated at Newnham College, Cambridge, and wrote under the name 'Rose de Bohème.' A contributor to the *Bulletin Storybook* (1901), she wrote two volumes of poetry, *The Call of the Blood and Other War Verses* (1914) and *Stray Chords* (1923), and with her husband J. F. Rose-Soley, a newspaper editor, *Manoupa*, a South Sea novel. She founded the Sydney Lyceum Club in 1914. She wrote a marching song for New Australia,<sup>136</sup> and an account of the *Royal Tar's* departure for *The Worker*.<sup>137</sup> With her husband she wrote, under the joint pen-name 'A. J. Rose-Soley', a widely reprinted account of New Australia for the *Westminster Review*. As well as the movement they discuss Lane the writer.

Speaking with a slight Yankee twang, he can write, when it pleases him, pure Yankee journalese. When it pleases him, also, he can pen eloquent, vibrating, absolutely pure Anglo-Saxon, with an old-fashioned simple grandeur which he himself attributes to the early influence of the Bible and John Bunyan. This

power is nowhere more manifest than in the one book he has published, *The Workingman's Paradise*, a hastily thrown together, loosely constructed story, written for the benefit of the Union Prisoners' Defence Fund after the Queensland bush strike of 1891, and insufficiently revised. For some reasons Lane's friends wish the book had never been brought out, as many a line bears evidence of how much better he could have done had he given his work more leisure, for others they are glad that it saw the light with all its imperfections, as there are pages upon pages of grand, rhythmic, soul-stirring prose, such as seldom gets printed in these modern days – sonorous prose, fruitful in ideas, which the world cannot afford to lose and which leaves a lasting impression on the reader.<sup>138</sup>

The poem Arty delivers in *The Workingman's Paradise* was written for the novel by Fred J. Broomfield, one of the Bohemians of the *Bulletin*. Lloyd Ross suggests 'it is possible' that the character of Arty, 'the people's poet', was based on Henry Lawson,<sup>139</sup> an identification accepted by Denton Prout.<sup>140</sup> Lawson's poem 'My Literary Friend' (1891) is about Broomfield's unhelpful critical suggestions for Lawson's poems. On this occasion Broomfield 'supplied the book with a last minute verse which Lawson had forgotten to write.'<sup>141</sup>

Gresley Lukin, who took over *The Boomerang* after Lane resigned, had brought Lawson to Brisbane for a job on the staff, which lasted March to September 1891. Lawson wrote regularly for both *The Boomerang* and Lane's *Worker* during this time. Hilton Barton stresses

This Brisbane episode brought Lawson more directly under the personal influence of William Lane, with a corresponding strengthening of ideological bonds, including the philosophy of "Mateship" as a cementing principle in trade union and socialist endeavour ... Henceforward Lane, the Propagandist of Mateship, and Lawson, the Poet of Mateship, moved along parallel paths in their devotion to the cause.<sup>142</sup>

At the height of the shearers' strike, Lane published Lawson's first contribution to *The Worker*, 'Freedom on the Wallaby':

So we must fly a rebel flag  
As others did before us ...  
They needn't say the fault is ours  
If blood should stain the wattle.<sup>143</sup>

F. T. Brentnall quoted the poem in the Queensland Legislative Council, in support of a motion thanking the military and civil officers for 'the suppression

of the late organised attempt to subvert the reign of law and order.' To Brentnall it was evidence of a political campaign for insurrection organised by the ALF and *The Worker*. The poem was reprinted in *Hansard*, to Lawson's delight, and to the inspiration of another poem, 'The Vote of Thanks Debate' in *The Worker*, 25 July 1891.<sup>144</sup> Lawson returned to Sydney, Jack Lang, his brother-in-law, recalled, 'with glowing reports about Lane.'<sup>145</sup> Lawson kept in touch with Lane; he wrote a couple of poems about the New Australia venture, 'Otherside', which appeared in *The Bulletin*, 23 January 1892, and the first issue of *New Australia*, and 'Something Better', *New Australia*, 24 March 1894.<sup>146</sup> Years later, around 1911–12, he recalled the period of his association with Lane in Brisbane in 'The Old Unionist':

The fighting, dying *Boomerang*  
Against the daily press,  
The infant *Worker* holding out;  
The families in distress;  
The sudden roars of beaten men –  
O you remember that: –  
Are memories that make my pen  
Not worth the while to rat.<sup>147</sup>

E. H. Lane describes another of Lane's contemporaries who appears in the novel.

An outstanding figure in the Australian revolutionary movement at this time, J. A. Andrews, philosophical anarchist, poet and rebel, was a regular talker in Sydney Domain on Sundays. Clothed in an overcoat to cover his sometimes shirtless body and tattered clothes ... a long pole with a small black flag attached to an overhead tree, he would deliver a two or three hours' exposition of the tenets of philosophic anarchy ... a man of exceptional ability. He published a book of poems, *The Temple of Death*, and was a fair linguist. With true anarchic fervor, he issued irregularly a little paper, *Revolt*, printed by type he cut out of wood.<sup>148</sup>

Ernie Lane occasionally went round with him putting up anarchist slogans and posters in the early hours of the morning. In *The Workingman's Paradise* the anarchist Sim describes his fellow anarchist Jones, clearly based on Andrews.

Jones hasn't got any type, and of course he can't afford to buy it, but he's got hold of a little second-hand toy printing press. To print from he takes a piece of wood, cut across the grain and rubbed smooth with sand, and cuts out of it the most revolutionary and blood-curdling leaflets, letter by letter ... Every old scrap of paper he can collect or get sent him he prints his leaflets on and gets them distributed all over the country. (41)

In *The Bitter Fight* Joe Harris reproduces a page of Andrews' paper *Anarchy* 'printed in type he cut out of wood'.<sup>149</sup>

And then there was Mary Gilmore. Harry Taylor recalled 'William Lane once told me that the very striking character of the heroine in *The Workingman's Paradise* was derived from a composite of Miss Cameron and another.'<sup>150</sup> Nettie Palmer wrote in 1926, of 'Mary Gilmore, the woman Lane took for his heroine in his remarkable novel.'<sup>151</sup> But William Wood wrote from Cosme in reply to the article:

I think it unlikely. I always understood that it (the heroine) was an imaginary character, and that 'Ned Hawkins' was a composite of the strike leaders in Queensland, the bush strike in 1891, of the pastoral workers there. David R. Stevenson, who knew Mrs Gilmore (then Miss Cameron) in Sydney, says that William Lane and Miss Cameron had not met prior to the book's publication.<sup>152</sup>

But Mary Gilmore always claimed to be the original of Nellie. On 9 May 1947 she wrote to Mr Fadden, leader of the Country Party in the House of Representatives, enclosing a curriculum vitae: '14. I am "Nellie" in William Lane's book *The Workingman's Paradise*. Every incident, every person, every conversation in the book is real.'<sup>153</sup>

And according to Mary Gilmore, the model for Ned was David Russell Stevenson, a bushman who went with Lane to New Australia and Cosme, and who was related to the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson.<sup>154</sup> As for the revolutionary Geisner, Lane reputedly met at one of the Rose-Soley gatherings a San Domingo planter 'whose father had fought in the Paris Commune and had spent twelve years in prisoned exile', and this provided the model.<sup>155</sup>

'Mr Hawkins, this is Bohemia. You do as you like. You say what you like', Mrs Stratton announces in an unmistakable patrician, haut-bourgeois way (57). Class divisions permeate bourgeois Bohemia just as they permeate the rest of society.

Ned's thoughts were in tumult, as he sat balancing his spoon on his cup after forcing himself to swallow the, to him, unpleasant drink that the others seemed to relish so. There were no conspirators here, that was certain. (59)

The emphasis is on bourgeois taste and bourgeois property and conspicuous consumption, in this beautiful waterfront house on the harbour.

It was pleasant, of course, too pleasant. It seemed a sin to enjoy life like this on the very edge of the horrible pit in which the poor were festering like worms in an iron pot. Was it for this Nellie had brought him here? To idle away an evening among well-meaning people who were "interested in the Labour movement" (59)

But the episode does more than contrast the middle-class comforts with the slums, doss-houses, and the homeless in the Domain. It introduces the topic of the role of art. The visitors discuss music and the *Zeitgeist*. ‘What a waste of words when the world outside needed deeds!’ Ned fumes inwardly (60) until he finally explodes:

Is it by playing music in fine parlours that good is to be done? Is it by drinking wine, by smoking, by laughing, by talking of pictures and books and music, by going to theatres, by living in clover while the world starves? Why do you not play that music in the back streets or to our fellows? (66)

It is the culmination of his frustration at conversations about environmental ‘vandalism which the naval authorities were perpetrating on Garden Island’ (57), and at the ease, comfort and irrelevance of the Strattons’ ‘culture’.

But in a sense Ned answers his own question. Geisner’s playing the *Marseillaise* has brought tears to Ned’s eyes, to everyone’s eyes. Art has its radicalising, inspirational role; it is music that has prompted Ned’s outburst. Ernie Lane reminds us that the *Marseillaise* was ‘the then international revolutionary song of the world’s workers.’<sup>156</sup> The anarchist Larry Petrie, who tried to blow up a scab ship between Sydney and Rockhampton, and later spent time at Cosme, used to sing it to attract a crowd to his street-corner speeches; he had had an arm amputated after a brawl with a non-union scab, and when he sang ‘To arms, my citizens’, waving his remaining arm in the air, the crowd was always vastly amused.<sup>157</sup> Henry Lawson wrote ‘The Australian Marseillaise, or A Song for the Sydney Poor.’<sup>158</sup>

The discussion about whether ‘Puritanism crushed the artistic sense out of the English’ (63) relates directly to the book’s politics. Geisner points out ‘the Puritan period produced two of the masterpieces of English Art – Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*’ (64). The radical politics of the English revolution are here identified with the production of literary masterpieces. England may have ‘no national music’ (63) but there is a national literature that is also a radical, revolutionary literature.

The discussion about art is important to the novel; it validates Lane’s own activity in writing the novel, it is his justification for taking time from direct organising. The arts can be the transmitters of radical social messages; they work in alliance with the deeds of the activists. But Ned’s specific question, ‘Why do you not play that music in the backstreets?’ is not answered by the bourgeois Bohemians. They are shocked at Ned’s ignorance in challenging a man who suffered so much for

the cause. But Lane himself took up the challenge he has Ned deliver. Lane spread his ideas not through the rarefied high arts and the private salons, but through the columns of *The Boomerang*, *The Worker*, and *New Australia*, applying his art to this novel that was sold through the labour movement and reached into the backstreets. He didn't neglect the bourgeoisie – he spent considerable time haranguing Brisbane opinion leaders in attempts to radicalise them; but he reached beyond that to the bushmen and the urban workers, devoting his literary gifts to the specifics of propaganda.

Finally and ultimately there is Lane's religious sense which permeates *The Workingman's Paradise* as it did all his writings and activities. It was not a narrowly denominational religion; indeed, it was not narrowly Christian. Geisner refers to 'Brahma and more than Brahma. What Prince Buddha thought out too. What Jesus the Carpenter dimly recognised. Not only Force, but Purpose ...' (76). Lane wrote in 1898 of his

absolute and unshakeable faith in what we commonly call 'God'. And when I say God I mean neither the idol built of wood or stone by the crude hands of savages nor the idol built of words and phrases by the equal heathenism of higher races. I mean by God the sense of the oneness, the livingness, the completeness, of that inconceivable power which working through matter called us and all the wondrous universe we see into being. That power I know and feel is supreme beyond all conceiving. Nothing is beyond its control.<sup>159</sup>

And it was this belief that was the basis of his communism:

to me communism is part of God's law. He who tries to live for his fellow as for himself, he who strives unceasingly to be less selfish and more human, he who with all his heart and soul endeavours to be communist of himself, freely, and to mould upon communistic lines the social organisation without which man cannot live on earth, he is, in so far, serving God and obeying God's law.<sup>160</sup>

*The Worker* (Brisbane), 2, 33, 5 September 1891, 4 announced as the first item in the regular 'Smoke-ho' column:

'The Working Man's Paradise', written by the editor of the *Worker* in aid of the Prisoners' Defence Fund, will be published in a few weeks: price 2s. 6d. Books containing a dozen order tickets will be issued shortly to all union secretaries and others willing to help in the sale. On receipt of 2s. 6d. the *Worker* will forward the books to any address in the colonies.

The notice was repeated in succeeding issues. On 31 October (2, 37, 2) it was announced “‘The Workingman’s Paradise’ will be published as soon as advance subscriptions sufficient to cover costs are received’. A reminder that ‘the book will not be sent to press until the cost of publication is guaranteed’ appeared on 14 November (2, 38, 2), and the following issue 28 November (2, 39, 2) announced that the novel ‘is going to press and will be out about New Year.’ *The Worker* for 6 February 1892 (2, 44, 2) announced that it

is now in the press but will soon be out. Messrs. Warwick and Sapsford, of Brisbane, are doing the printing, and making an excellent job of it. Subscribers ... mustn’t get impatient, because they’re encouraging native industry in the printing line, and books of that class are not often printed in Queensland.

On 5 March (2, 46, 2) it was announced

The last proofs of ‘The Workingman’s Paradise’ have been seen as the Worker goes to press. The delay, which has been as usual the printer’s fault, has been uncontrollable by anybody else. The book will certainly be out this month.

Finally *The Worker* of 2 April 1892 (3, 48) announced ‘The publication of “The Workingman’s Paradise” is commenced this week’ and the issue of 9 April (3, 49, 3) declared “‘The Workingman’s Paradise” after an irritating but unavoidable delay, has been published and forwarded to subscribers.’ It was reviewed on the same page.

*The Workingman’s Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel* by John Miller was published by Edwards, Dunlop & Co., Sydney, Brisbane and London, and the Worker Board of Trustees, Brisbane, 1892. The title page declared ‘PRICE 2/6.’ It was cloth bound.

A paperbound edition, with its title page declaring ‘PRICE 1/3’ appeared later. It was advertised for the first time in *The Worker* (Brisbane), 1 July 1893, (4, 113, 2): ‘There is only a limited supply of the Cheap Edition.’

Both editions are dated 1892, and use the same typesetting. The cloth bound edition advertises *The Worker* and *In New Australia*, at the end of the text. The paperbound edition has a new, smaller advertisement for *The Worker* and has replaced the announcement of the novel’s sequel with an advertisement for the New Australia movement.

In 1948 the novel was reissued in cloth and paper bound editions by Cosme Publishing Co., Box 675, GPO Sydney, with a new seven-page preface by E. H. Lane, and some textual variation and excisions of unknown authority.

The epigraphs to parts I and II of the novel are from Algernon Charles Swinburne's poem, 'Our Lady of Pain'. Selected stanzas from the poem were published in *The Worker* (Brisbane), 13 June 1891, (2, 26, 6), with a note by Lane: 'I used to quote these verses to Chairman Bennett of the C. D. Strike Committee, in Adelaide last February. Anybody who doesn't see how they apply to him and his mates had better read something else.'

**Introduction to the facsimile reprint of *The Workingman's Paradise*, Australian Literary Reprints, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1980.**



## William Lane and *The Worker Book Fund*: 'Progressive Books at Cost'

While editing the Brisbane *Worker*, William Lane established *The Worker Book Fund*. The idea was first discussed by him in the third issue of *The Worker*, 1 May 1890.

It is hardly enough to know that such a book is good if you can't get hold of it, not even though within a few hundred miles it is selling for a shilling and you have several of them to spare. Co-operation on sound business lines will solve the difficulty. It is not possible just yet for the workers to get up for themselves the 'travelling free library'<sup>1</sup> which *The Boomerang* is always urging the Government to start, but they can chip in their sixpences and shillings on a 'Book Fund' to be invested in cheap and popular books, these to be supplied by mail to any address upon receipt of the cost price as announced in the *Worker*. By such an arrangement it would speedily be possible to send *Looking Backward*, *Co-operative Commonwealth*, George's books, *Story of an African Farm* and innumerable other sound, fascinating and elevating books to the Flinders or the Maranoa or Cooktown prepaid for one shilling. A sailor, a bushman, an artisan, a farmer or a labourer, who wanted to read any volume on the 'Book Fund' list would only have to enclose postal note or stamps for the price named – the *cost price*, plus postage would be the price named – to the *Worker* Office and by return mail he would get his book. Sheds could order 25 or 50 or 100 books, the whole list if they liked, and have a first-class little library for a song.

But not only the bushman but the townsman would benefit. How hard it is to get progressive books even in Brisbane! How they are jumped and begged for, almost stolen, by hundreds who have heard of them and ache to read them when they see them! A Brisbane man could drop into *The Worker* Office for his book and would be wanting to do so as often as a Townsville or Blackall man would be mailing for one. It would be the initiative, too, for a great propaganda and educational work which should be centered in the projected Brisbane and Townsville Trades Halls. It is the index, too, of what is possible if we join in making *The Worker* what it should be, the means by which we monthly work more and more together.

The 'Book Fund' is already started. Encouraged by the tone of a letter from the Aramac shed, lately shearing, the plan was sketched out and Mr. Mark Helmore was asked to read it to the crowd assembled there and see what they thought of it. The answer was almost by return mail and took the shape of a P.O.O. for £4.12s.6d.

In the following issue Lane wrote that ‘subscription lists are being sent round in town and country and when there is £100 in hand a ‘Co-operative Book Exchange’ will be opened by *The Worker* trustees ... There will be no management expenses: progressive books at cost.’

*The Worker* proved successful enough to change from monthly to fortnightly publication with its ninth number (18 October 1890) and in that issue announced that the Book Fund would be operational with its first three titles – *Looking Backward*, *Co-operative Commonwealth* and *Progress and Poverty* – next month (3). In the eleventh number, 15 November, *Progress and Poverty* was replaced by *The Old Order and the New* (3) and in the following number, 29 November, it was announced that ‘The rush upon *The Worker* Book Exchange is so great and the supply of books obtainable so limited that some delay is arising in filling some orders, for which consideration is asked.’ Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and *The Old Order and the New* were announced as available, and eighteen titles were listed as available ‘probably within a month, but possibly not so soon.’ (3) The list of twenty titles, with *Story of an African Farm* replaced by the Fabian *Essays on Socialism*, was repeated in the next two numbers, 13 and 27 December 1890. No further announcement appeared until 25 July 1891 (volume 2, 30, 4) after the conclusion of the shearers’ strike which had preoccupied Lane and *The Worker* from January through June 1891. Twelve titles in all were advertised; two of them additional to the previous twenty (*Progress and Poverty* and *Our Destiny*); the other ten were *Co-operative Commonwealth*, *Ethics of Socialism*, *Socialism in England*, *Conventional Lies*, *England’s Ideal*, *The Old Order and the New*, *Looking Backward*, *Social Problems*, *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*. *Caesar’s Column* replaced *England’s Ideal* in the announcement of 3 October 1891 (2, 35, 4). *Why I am a Republican* and *Co-operative Settlement* were added the following issue, 17 October (2, 36, 4). From then until the last announcement, 5 March 1892 (2, 46, 4) the list, under the heading ‘Labour Books’ remained unchanged. From 2 April 1892 *The Worker* became a weekly, its format was changed, paid advertising was accepted for the first time. Lane resigned the editorship of *The Worker* with the issue of 30 July 1892 (3, 65) in order to devote himself to the New Australia Co-operative settlement. He was succeeded by Ernest Blackwell (6 August 1892 – 26 August 1893), who in turn was succeeded by W. G. Higgs with the issue of 2 September (4, 122).<sup>2</sup>

A complete list of titles in the Book Fund follows. I have added authors’ names where omitted, and dates of publication. I have not noted variations in price

from their first announcement. Some titles were cloth bound, others paper, and occasionally both bindings were available.

- Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888), 6d.  
 J. Morrison Davidson, *The Old Order and the New* (1884), 1s.  
 Laurence Gronlund, *Co-operative Commonwealth* (1884), 2s.  
 Herbert Spencer, *Man Versus the State* (1884), 1s.  
 W. S. Jevons, *The State in Relation to Labour* (1886), 3s.  
 Henry George, *Social Problems* (1882), 1s.  
 Max Nordau, *Conventional Lies of Our Civilization* (1884), 2s. 6d.  
 Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke* (1850), 6d.  
 Charles Kingsley, *Yeast* (1851), 6d.  
 Olive Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm* (1883), 1s.  
 Karl Marx on Value (presumably *The Theory of Value Complete forming the first nine chapters of Capital* published in the Bellamy Library, W. Reeves, London, 1890), 1s.  
 Dr A. Schaffle, *Quintessence of Socialism* (1874), 2s. 6d.  
 Thorold Rogers, *Eight Centuries of Work and Wages* (presumably *Eight Chapters on the History of Work and Wages. Being a reprint of chapters VIII, XII, XIV, XV, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX of Six Centuries of Work and Wages* [1884] Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1885), 2s. 6d.  
 E. Belfort Bax, *Religion of Socialism* (1887), 2s. 6d.  
 E. Belfort Bax, *Ethics of Socialism* (1889), 2s. 6d.  
 George Bernard Shaw, *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883), 2s.  
 George Bernard Shaw, ed., *Essays on Socialism by Members of the Fabian Society* (1889), 1s.  
 Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal* (1885), 1s.  
 Sidney Webb, *Socialism in England* (1889), 2s. 6d.  
 Herbert V. Mills, *Poverty and the State* (1886), 1s.  
 Laurence Gronlund, *Our Destiny* (1890), 3s.  
 Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), 1s.  
 Ignatius Donnelly, *Caesar's Column* (1889), 8d.  
 George Black, *Why I am a Republican* (2nd edition 1891), 3s.  
 [William Lane,] *Co-operative Settlement: Aims and Basis of Organisation and Articles of Association of the New Australia Cooperative Settlement Association* (1891), 2d. 2s. per dozen.

Two further titles also became available from *The Worker* Office. Though the Book Fund was not advertised after 5 March 1892, *The Worker* of 2 April 1892 (3, 48) announced in the 'Smoke Ho' column that Lane's own novel, *The Workingman's Paradise* by John Miller (the name under which he edited the *Worker*) was available.<sup>3</sup> It had been announced as forthcoming since 5 September 1891 (2, 33, 4) but had been held up by printing delays, and it continued to be advertised until 18 June 1892

(3, 59, 4). It cost 2s. 6d. A cheap edition for 1s. 3d. – the unbound sheets issued in paper covers – was first advertised 1 July 1893 (4, 113, 2); it was last advertised 11 November 1893 (4, 132, 4). The following issue announced the release of the union prisoners, gaoled for ‘conspiracy’ after the shearers’ strike, on whose behalf the novel had been published.

Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, given its first Australian publication<sup>4</sup> in abridged, serial form in the *Worker* under W. G. Higgs’s editorship from 9 September to 14 October 1893 (4, 123–4, 128), was announced as ‘now ready’ in pamphlet form on 18 November 1893 (4, 133, 4), price 1d., postage 1d., price to booksellers, stationers, etc., 8d. per dozen.

Though neither of these publications was part of the Book Fund, they followed the initiative of the programme in offering alternative mail-order distribution directed at unionists. (Trade distribution of *The Workingman’s Paradise* was handled by Edwards, Dunlop & Co., co-publishers with *The Worker* Board of Trustees of *The Workingman’s Paradise*.)

There is no individual entry on the Book Fund in *The Worker’s* first year’s financial statement (12, 26; 13 June 1891, 8). The second statement, for 7 February 1891 to 28 March 1892 (2, 56; 28 May 1892, 3) recorded an income of £82.14.10 from the Book Fund. The statement for 28 March 1892 to 31 December 1892 (3, 92; 11 February 1893, 4) records £6.1.5 income to the Book Fund. This appears to be the last mention of the fund; there is no entry in the statement for 1 January to 1 July 1893 (4, 118; 5 August 1893, 4).

A statement on *The Workingman’s Paradise* receipts and expenditure up to 31 December 1892 (3, 93; 18 February 1893, 4) records that 5000 copies were printed, 3781 of which were bound and 1219 of which remained unbound in the hands of the printer. 2711 copies had been sold by this date, 1925 through the General Secretary’s office, and 786 by Edwards, Dunlop and Co.; 100 copies had been sent for review, copyright registration etc. The cost of printing and binding (£239.18.8) and other ancillary expenses had been covered at this point by income received from sales.

The Book Fund programme was part of Lane’s larger political-cultural strategy. It was supported by and in its turn supported the educational programme of the *Worker*. *Looking Backward* was serialised in abridged form in the *Worker* from its first issue, 1 March 1890 through to 27 December 1890 (1, 14). And Lane discussed in his regular ‘Books Well Worth Reading’ column *Looking Backward* (1 March 1890,

14), George's *Social Problems* (1 April, 14), *Story of an African Farm* (4 June, 10), Marx (1 July, 6) and Max Nordau and Ibsen (7 August, 11). Under his editorship the *Worker* also included articles and excerpts from writers whose work appeared in the fund – Gronlund, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Olive Schreiner, Marx, Bellamy, Edward Carpenter, Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* – as well as from other Australian and overseas writers. The orientation was 'progressive' but not narrowly political. Poetry and prose, both new and reprinted, appeared from Francis Adams, Henry Lawson, Fred J. Broomfield, E. J. Brady, E. F. Hughes, Arthur Desmond, Ernest Radford, John Boyle O'Reilly, A. J. Simpson, W. Crompton, Charles Mackay, Vagabond Charley, Shaughraun, John Lane, Owen Maguire, Wallace Nelson, H. E. Boote, Julian Stuart, Arthur Rae, W. Kidston, Ebenezer Elliott, William Morris, Kipling, Tolstoy, Massey, Shelley, Swinburne, Byron, Carlyle, Emerson, James Russell Lowell, Walt Whitman, Joseph Dana Miller, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, E. Nesbitt amongst others.<sup>5</sup> Henry George, Bellamy, Gronlund, Marx and others were regularly cited and commented on in the 'Smoke Ho' column, the 'Editorial Mill' and other features.

The *Worker* Book Fund was an important episode in Australian cultural history. It was a pioneering attempt to provide an alternative to conservative, establishment control of cultural materials and to commercial publishing and bookselling. Both in mode of distribution and in range of titles it was a radical intervention. It was, moreover, oriented to workingmen and women – it was not designed for a privileged, elite minority. It introduced into circulation and discussion works not otherwise readily available. And its intention and effects are reflected in the contemporary literary context, in Fred Broomfield's recollection of Francis Adams – 'walking round and round Wynyard Square with Broomfield one moonlight night, he recited Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth*; and the former found afterwards that he had read the book by proxy'<sup>6</sup> – and more sardonically, in Henry Lawson's 1892 sketch 'A Day on a Selection', in which *Progress and Poverty*, *Looking Backward* and *Caesar's Column* are discussed as the selection falls apart.

*Southerly*, 41, 1981.

## **Anne Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay***

Unlike our own sad times, the nineteenth century ended with a vast array of socialist schemes, both theoretical and practical. There were the utopian fictions of William Morris and Edward Bellamy, there were the radical political movements ranging from Fabian to Communist, there was the development of trades union organisation and activity, there were the beginnings of parliamentary labour parties, there was an active women's movement, and there were the developing scenarios of revolution. It was in this context that the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association was established, and set up its community in Paraguay.

It was just one of many contemporary attempts to initiate a fairer, juster, better way of life. That it failed does not mark it off as very different from most of the other initiatives of those times. A hundred years later most of them seem to have failed to deliver what they promised – the parliamentary labour parties, the trades unions, and the soviet revolution. What is important is that these attempts were made. They remain there as inspirational for better times ahead.

William Lane and his associates took up land in Paraguay in 1893 because they were not able to acquire it in Australia. They were not committed to being remote or isolated. South America was no more 'remote' than South Africa or Australia in the 1890s, it was all perceived as frontier for development. They did, however, try to isolate the settlement from the pervasive destructive elements of nineteenth-century society – from alcohol and from any social or political conflict with their immediate environment. But they took the seeds of destruction with them. My own reading of the contemporary records is that there were one or more *agents provocateurs* within the first batch of settlers who systematically disrupted things from the very beginning, so that the first settlement rapidly fell apart.

In *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay* Anne Whitehead accepts this interpretation as likely.<sup>1</sup> Her own concern, however, is not especially with the politics of the enterprise. Lloyd Ross's *William Lane and the Australian Labour Movement*<sup>2</sup> still remains the best introduction to that aspect. And though

she contributes some hitherto unpublished materials – notably the letters of the Englishman Tozer who joined the pioneers when they arrived in South America – her study does not significantly supplement Gavin Souter's history of the settlement, *A Peculiar People*.<sup>3</sup>

*Paradise Misland* is a different sort of book. It is a hybrid, revisiting the story of New Australia in parallel with a personal travelogue of the author's own visits to Paraguay. The focus is divided pretty well equally between an account of the original settlement, and an exploration of the individual histories of those members of the movement and their descendants who stayed on in Paraguay. Amidst it all we are given pretty well everything you ever might have wanted to know about Paraguayan history – the Jesuit run communal settlements for the indigenous Guarani, the war of the Triple Alliance that left the country almost without menfolk, the war of the 1930s, and the Stroessner dictatorship.

As much as with the original settlers, Anne Whitehead is concerned with their descendants. She has travelled on the river boats and railway trains along the routes the pioneers took, she has revisited the original settlements and she writes movingly of the few, fading relics, the neglected graveyards. She has also met and interviewed the octogenarian survivors who remembered the last days of New Australia and Colonia Cosme from their childhood. And she has followed the stories of the families still there through their successive generations. And what extraordinary stories there are. Two I found especially memorable. There was Leon Cadogan, who did so much to record the language and myths of the indigenous peoples of Paraguay and to press for some amelioration in their living conditions, drawing international attention to what was in effect planned genocide. And there is Robin Wood, never knowing who his father was, who after a series of dead-end jobs in his youth made a spectacularly successful career writing story lines for comics sold in millions throughout South America.

The New Australia movement was far more than a 'footnote' to Australian history. It was part of an international movement, an amazing experiment in practical communism. At the same time it was yet another aspect of Anglo-Celtic expansionism. It was an expression of political hope, and it was full of contradictions. That is why it continues to hold its fascination for us.

*Overland*, 152, Spring 1998.

## Eleanor Dark: *Prelude to Christopher*

The reissue of Eleanor Dark's *Prelude to Christopher* (1934)<sup>1</sup> restores to circulation a vivid, important and immensely readable novel. Often cited as one of the early examples of Australian modernism, its shifts in time, from the present of Nigel Hendon's motor accident to the past of the island utopia he attempted to establish, certainly have their modernist aspect. But the novel's modernism resides less in any aesthetic or technical devices than in its presentation of modern attitudes, to society and sexuality, in conflict with the conventions and conservatism of the dominant conformity.

In this it is very much a novel of its time. The First World War with its appalling waste of life is ever present. This is one of those novels that records the social and mental dislocation resulting from the war, and that sees the war as a product of a pre-existent endemic social and mental dislocation. It refuses society's salves of the elevation of patriotism and worthy sacrifice.

Central is that early twentieth-century preoccupation with heredity and eugenics. Nigel's utopia was one in which the mentally and physically fit were to be bred. Tragically, he marries Linda, whose family history is 'tainted' with insanity of a particularly violent, homicidal nature. The specific eugenic concerns may now seem dated, though they are not: their assumptions lie unchanged behind contemporary genetic engineering theory and practice. The preoccupation with dormant, hereditary insanity waiting to emerge, however, has a note of late nineteenth-century modernism: Ibsen's *Ghosts* haunts the novel.

Then there is the melodrama of the mad scientist, going back from H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* through Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Nigel is a doctor obsessed with the idea of eugenics. But there is also Linda's truly atrocious scientist uncle who gloatingly charts the recurrence of homicidal craziness on the family tree, exempting himself but marking down his niece. And here we move into family psychodrama, Dr Hamlin standing each night at the foot of pubescent Linda's bed, watching for craziness and remorselessly destroying her sleep and stability and confidence. The sexual



suggestions remain just that, suggestions, implicit. But Linda's later propensity for taking lovers and for being a bad wife, as the locals see it, externalises the sexual tensions into a portrait of early twentieth-century modern woman, emancipation in the context of a repressive community. Barbara Brooks's brief afterword is excellent on the feminist and the Gothic. (She notes that Dark asked her agent to send a copy of the book to Bette Davis).

Eleanor Dark's later career, and the destructive harassment she and her socialist husband received from ASIO, have associated her with the left-wing tradition of Australian writing. This early work, her second novel, however, is very much a middle-class affair. The lower orders are shocked at the goings-on, over-interpret them with a seedy sexuality, and talk in funny accents. However, the social conservatism is not a matter of class or of age. It is pervasive. Nigel's mother, old, bourgeois, represents the traditional values of a dead society. But Kay, the twenty-year-old nurse who falls in love with Nigel, is no less narrow and conventional in her vision. The young of the new generation are as benighted as the old in Dark's bleak analysis. The book's title is grimly sardonic.

I first read *Prelude to Christopher* when I was researching William Lane's New Australia movement for *The Paraguayan Experiment*,<sup>2</sup> since it had been suggested that Dark had Lane's settlement in mind. But the focus of Nigel's utopia is eugenic, not communist, and the political and economic basis of it is never examined, beyond passing assertions of Nigel's dictatorial rule. It finally erupts with a mass uprising and murder, whereas Lane's experiment ended without violence. Dark's novel is not an allusion to Lane's experiment except insofar as both utopias failed, giving a pessimistic vision of mankind's ability ever rationally to improve society. The dominance of the conformist and unthinking over the individual and the visionary is the book's final note.

P. R. Stephensen first published this novel in 1934, when established publishers shied away. He then went bankrupt and half the copies were seized. Rigby reissued it in 1961. In the 1980s I remember contributing to a *Bulletin* feature on books that should be reissued and suggesting *Prelude to Christopher* should be, but it wasn't. At some point Virago were going to reissue it, but didn't. At last it has reappeared, and once again it has been a small, independent publisher, Halstead Press, that has brought it into print.

*Overland*, 163, Winter 2001.

# Jack Lindsay

One of the great thinkers, writers, and men of letters of the twentieth century, Jack Lindsay has received comparatively little serious discussion. He is so prolific, so formidably learned, that there are very few writers in a position to discuss the full range of his work. I certainly cannot hope to. This piece simply indicates something of the range of his literary work. His books range from classical studies to the fine arts, from biography and history to fiction and poetry. And he is not merely the desk-bound writer. In a couple of pieces I wrote for the *Australian Author* on little magazines and small presses, I found that in each case I had begun my account with Jack Lindsay; in both areas he was a pioneer.<sup>1</sup> The magazine *Vision* and the Fanfrolico Press are historic landmarks in Australian literary development, part of a revitalising movement in Australian culture.

Lindsay (born in 1900) left Australia in 1928, but kept in continual contact. In 1936 he published a children's novel with an Australian setting, long overdue for reissue, *Rebels of the Goldfields*. From the 1950s to the 1970s he wrote a series of major assessments of Australian writers for *Meanjin* – on Vance Palmer, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Alan Marshall, and Barbara Baynton – and an introduction to the English paperback edition of Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*.<sup>2</sup> And his autobiographical trilogy deals with his Queensland childhood in the first volume, *Life Rarely Tells* (1958), with Sydney's literary bohemia in *The Roaring Twenties* (1960) and with his early years in England in *Fanfrolico and After* (1962).

In the mid-1930s Lindsay began writing an important series of historical novels, using his scholarship in classical studies – he took a first class honours degree in classics at the University of Queensland – his wide-ranging knowledge of historical development, and his understanding of social processes. *Cressida's First Lover* (1931) was followed by the trilogy *Rome for Sale* (1934), *Caesar is Dead* (1934) and *Last Days with Cleopatra* (1935); the trilogy was reissued in response to demand by English library readers in Chivers New Portway library editions, a sure sign of demand. *Men of Forty-Eight* (1948) has similarly been reissued, one of the novels he wrote about later periods, which include *1649: a novel of a year* (1938), *Fires in Smithfield*

(1950) and *The Great Oak* (1957). In the 1950s he turned to novels of contemporary England with *Betrayed Spring* (1953), *The Way the Ball Bounces* (1962), *Masks and Faces* (1963) and *All on the Never-Never* (1961) which was made into a film, the only work of his that has been filmed, though the classical series has television drama potential.

James Borg published his edition of *Jack Lindsay: Collected Poems* in 1981. Jack had always seen himself as a poet and his first published volume was poetry, *Fauns and Ladies* (1923). His new sense of participation with the progressive elements of human society led to his innovative and strikingly successful activist public poetry, the mass declarations *Who are the English?* (1936) and *On Guard for Spain* (1937). His later 'Last Words with Dylan Thomas' in *Three Elegies* (1957) is one of the great elegies of all time. Throughout his life he continued to write poetry, making a point, he told me, of writing a poem to go along with the dedication in each of his books. And it is important to note here Lindsay's translations. He has been a prolific translator, enthusiastically making accessible the great, the forgotten and the esoteric. This has been an important, practical activity, sharing his erudition in the positive way of making those works available, whether through the fine, collectors' editions of the Fanfrolico Press or the mass-market paperbacks of Elek's Bestseller Library. He has translated *Lysistrata* (1925), *The Satyricon* (1927, revised 1960), Theocritus (1929), Catullus (1929), *The Golden Ass* (1932, revised 1960), *Daphnis & Chloe* (1948), and *Adam Mickiewicz* (1957), amongst others. And he has edited and translated the anthologies *Medieval Latin Poets* (1934), *Russian Poetry 1917–55* (1957), *Ribaldry of Greece* (1961) and *Ribaldry of Rome* (1961).

Lindsay's contribution to literature has been as great if not greater in the areas of criticism, biography and history. His great characteristic is the way he approaches his subject looking for his or her positive strengths and achievements, and persuades us of their interest. We want to go and read George Meredith or William Morris or Vance Palmer or the troubadours after reading his critical and historical accounts. And of how many critical works can that be said?

His early study of *John Bunyan* (1937, reissued 1969) remains a classic. It is one of the earliest, pioneering attempts to offer a sustained Marxist reading of a major English literary figure. Its pioneering achievement has been admired by the historian Christopher Hill and denigrated by the critic F. R. Leavis. Leavis's famous attack on it, reprinted in *The Common Pursuit* (1952) is a classic of misrepresentation

and distortion. Having written that 'Mr Lindsay is mainly concerned to show that Bunyan's religion was merely a self-comprehending reaction to the class-war', Leavis then transferred his own use of 'merely' to Lindsay: 'while Mr Lindsay's "merely" has the intention of exalting ...' Leavis's essay attacked both Lindsay and William York Tindall; when he returned to Bunyan to write an afterword for the Signet edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1964) Leavis still referred to Tindall's study, now a 'valuable scholarly work', but any mention of Lindsay is totally excluded from this American series of classic texts.

First distortion, then suppression. Lindsay nowhere reduces Bunyan's religion to 'a self-comprehending reaction to the class-war'; what he does do is place the particular form of expression of Bunyan's religious convictions in the social context of its time, seeing the historical, revolutionary moment and its aftermath of repression in Bunyan's writing. Lindsay's *John Bunyan* remains one of the great, stimulating, enduring literary approaches to the seventeenth century. And Leavis, who rarely revealed his political position so explicitly, was here stung to come out in the open:

Though Mr Lindsay talks of 'fuller life' he proffers emptiness, like most Marxist writers who undertake to explain art and culture, he produces the effect of having emptied life of content and everything of meaning.

It is impossible in any case to believe that the classless society produced by the process that the Marxist's History has determined on could have a cultural content comparable with that represented by *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Lindsay's *John Bunyan* is an indispensable work for any student of Bunyan, just as his *George Meredith* (1953) is for any student of Meredith. Again, the study situates Meredith in his social environment and draw out of his works the expression of the social conflicts and class-tensions Meredith observed and experienced and took as his themes. But Meredith has been the preserve of the formalists, and it is possible to take up academic studies of Meredith, as of Bunyan, and find no mention of, no reference to, no awareness of Lindsay's work.

As literary studies became an academic subject, the Victorian man of letters gave way before the professional academic writing for career and promotion; lit. crit. became professionalised like the law and medicine. Lindsay wrote from outside the academy. At no stage did he hold a university position. His phenomenal output of historical, literary and cultural studies has been the work of a dedicated, unsalaried,

unsinced writer. He never came back to Australia after leaving in 1928 because he was living from his writing, he had to keep producing books, he could never take time out to return.

Lindsay is one of the last of a rare breed, the independent intellectual. But this very independence not only required the bondage of continuous production, but also ensured his exclusion from the professional lit. crit. world. His works were generally ignored, frozen out. Moreover he followed a procedure absolutely out of fashion with the prevailing mood of the times; he wrote the 'life and works' book, uniting the biographical with the critical, setting both in a historical context; his great success with this approach came not with the literary studies such as his *Charles Dickens* (1950) but with the series of studies in the visual arts. After a pioneering study of French art, *Death of the Hero: French Painting from David to Delacroix* (1960), he wrote the first of a series of biographical-critical studies of artists, *J. M. W. Turner* (1966), which received immediate acclaim. This was followed by *Cézanne* (1969), *Gustave Courbet* (1973) and *Hogarth* (1977), and by studies of two figures whose work, like Lindsay's, cannot be defined within any single literary or visual art: *William Morris* (1975) and *William Blake* (1978).

But academic lit. crit. was firmly into the words on the page approach, the 'practical criticism' of the Richards–Leavis–Empson variety in Britain, and the 'new criticism' of the Brooks and Warren approach in the USA. These critical methodologies reached their full development in the Cold War years (the First Cold War as we have to call it now, *Time* having announced the Second Cold War). Politics, social relevance, ethics, religion, biography, history, literary history, psychology were all excluded from the study of literature. Academic literary study became a system of exclusions – don't talk about characters, don't tell us about the author's biography, don't leave the text for history ... And the 'prac. crit.' close reading method remained dominant in a vague, unvigorous way. It is easier to talk about one short poem, one brief paragraph, than to survey the 'life and works' in a tutorial; it is easier and safer to exclude politics, psychology, religion, biography, history – otherwise the students will start to relate the work to their own commitments and experience, life will intrude; and when life intrudes you have the problems of examination assessment. It is easier and safer to say 'we don't mind what you think, it is how you express it that matters' – much easier than to have to encounter the ideas. Saves having to read the history and the politics and the biography. Saves parents complaining about what is

discussed ... pragmatic liberalism; and the result is that academic lit. crit. generally keeps away from the ideas, the biography, the characters, the social relevance; it becomes the absent centre amidst the suppressed taboo topics.

This general drift within the subject could not have happened without a little pushing, a little direction. The Cold War, the purges of the 1950s, were the decisive weapons. McCarthyism occurred in Britain as well as in the USA and Australia – though to call it McCarthyism is to be led to vilify one man and ignore the full orchestration. It was a wider anti-communism than that of a few front men. Indeed in England the front men were less obvious, but the purges and exclusions no less effective. Lindsay's three autobiographies don't deal with those years – though his *Meetings with Poets: Memories of Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard and Tristan Tzara* (1968) valuably establishes the political context of the European writers he knew. In a later piece in *Stand* magazine, Lindsay made one of his few comments on the fifties, writing of

The worsening Cold War, which had devastating effects here, though nothing as bad as the McCarthyism which was the form it took in the USA. Still, the cultural chill set in. Let me cite some examples from my own experience. The *Times Literary Supplement* used the review of my *Byzantium in Europe* for a call to banish Marxists from university posts; and no firm would have published my novels at that time except the Bodley Head under Nicholson. Not that he was at all left in politics, but he was a man of genuine liberal principles. He also at this time published Howard Fast and James Aldridge. (The *TLS* did not review the novels in question, then wrote a leading article attacking them.) It was the early years of the Cold War that saw the crystallisation of the myth, now accepted as gospel, about the Thirties. For instance, Spender worked enthusiastically with me and others on the Writers Group of the SCR in immediate post-war years, when we had active and friendly relations ... his positions were very different from what they became after the few years he then spent in the USA ... A primary need of the Cold War was to break down the spirit of antifascist unity that had redeveloped during the war; and so an outstanding enemy were the poets of the French Resistance in whom that spirit had most powerfully and richly matured. I can still recall the shock of delight and stimulation with which I read a copy of the underground *L'Honneur des Poètes* during the war; and in the following years I came to know a considerable number of these poets. I made translations of poems by Aragon, Eluard, Tzara and others. Several publishers turned my manuscripts down. Then one of them took the step of saying, with what for me was an unprecedented piece of publishing honesty, 'Why did you do this book? It won't get into print. Surely you know these resistance fighters were a pack of brigands.'<sup>23</sup>

And so it was that John Gross, editor of the CIA funded Congress for Cultural Freedom's *Encounter* and later of the *TLS*, could write in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (1969):

Not even sympathisers, however, are likely to want to resurrect English communist criticism of the 1930s, and at this hour in the day it would be pointless to rake up the dogmatic pronouncements of Alick West, Philip Henderson, Jack Lindsay or the firing-squad of the *Left Review* (edited by, among others, Edgell Rickword) ...

Well, in 1969, the reissue of that material would have been very valuable. It would still be valuable. But it still remains generally unavailable. For instance, the University of Sydney has no holdings of *Left Review* or *New Masses*; even its holdings of the *Australian Communist Review* are woefully incomplete, unbound, and not even in the stacks, but stored away in the dust of the 'deposit library' from where they have to be specially ordered and brought over a few days later.

But despite all the exclusions, one-line dismissals, suppressions and distortions, the work of Jack Lindsay remains and survives. It stands there as a marvellous treasury of Marxist practice, a great, positive achievement from one of the foremost writers and thinkers of the twentieth century.

*Overland*, 83, 1981.

## Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*

Jack Lindsay's autobiographical trilogy, *Life Rarely Tells*, is one of the classics of Australian writing. The first volume, *Life Rarely Tells* (1958) is an unforgettable memoir of an Edwardian colonial childhood in pre-World War I Sydney and Brisbane; the second, *The Roaring Twenties* (1960), is set in the hectic world of Sydney's Bohemia; and the third, *Fanfrolico and After* (1962) records an Australian cultural invasion of literary London in the late nineteen-twenties and thirties.

Australian literary life from the 1890s to World War I is well documented. This is the archetypal period of the 'legend'. *A Curate in Bohemia* (1913) by Jack's father Norman Lindsay recorded the eighteen-nineties. Marcus Clarke had fondly recorded Melbourne's Bohemia of the 1860s and 1870s. The nineteen-twenties have been comparatively unexplored. The sagas of Bloomsbury, Paris and Greenwich Village have become better known than Australia's own Bohemian tradition. Jack Lindsay establishes the significance, the feeling, and above all the complexity of those years. The great figures of the nineties are still present, brooding presences of rejection, ruin, decline and isolation. Christopher Brennan, dismissed from the university, his daughter Anna, S. A. Rosa, Randolph Bedford, Henry Lawson, A. G. Stephens, Fred Broomfield, Hugh McCrae – figures later commemorated in Norman Lindsay's memoir *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (1965). These were the ghosts of the great radical nationalist achievement of Australian writing. By the twenties the radicalism had been undermined, defeated in the maritime and shearers' strikes, the failure of the New Australia experiment, the destruction of the I.W.W., the International Workers of the World. Insofar as it survived, the radical impetus had retreated strategically into the attempt to work within the system of the parliamentary Labor Party, itself split and out of power as a result of the conscription issue in World War I. Nationalism looked tired and compromised after the slaughter of the war. And the horrors of the war break into the Edwardian adolescence of the first volume, notably in the shell-shocked soldier who comes to tea. Norman Lindsay withdrew from the social realm into a realm of pure art, absolute value. It was a reactive formation in fear and distaste of the mass slaughter, compounded with the fear of



mass revolutionary action unleashed by the war, as in 1917. The Nietzschean, neo-Platonic vitalism that Norman Lindsay expounded in his *Creative Effort* (1920) found a ready social acceptance. Jack became its prophet in the literary world.

Jack, Philip and Ray were the three sons of Norman Lindsay (1879–1969) by his first marriage to Katie Parkinson. Jack was born in Melbourne in 1900 when Norman was twenty-one. The family moved to Sydney and Jack recalls the years at Lavender Bay up to the end of the marriage in 1909, and Katie's taking the three boys to Brisbane. Norman married Rose Soady who had modelled for many of his paintings and, by the time Jack returned to Sydney in 1920, was living seventy-five kilometres from Sydney near Springwood in the Blue Mountains. Now a National Trust property, left to the nation by Norman Lindsay and open to the public, the house and grounds provide a permanent exhibition of his paintings, etchings, ship models, sculptures, drawings, books, manuscripts and memorabilia. Norman's own memoirs are in *My Mask* (1970), Rose's in *Model Wife* (1967), and Jane's, the elder of their two daughter's, in *Portrait of Pa: Norman Lindsay at Springwood* (1973). John Hetherington's *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian* (1973) is the authorised biography.

Jack's arrival in Sydney was both an entry into the life of literature, and a rediscovery of his father; and not only of the father but also of Norman's brothers: the eldest, Percy, always ready to have a drink, and Lionel, who had broken off contact with Norman because of a quarrel over spiritualism. Lionel's memoirs, *Comedy of Life* (1967), and those of the youngest brother Daryl, *The Leafy Tree: My Family* (1965) and of Daryl's wife Joan, *Time Without Clocks* (1962) offer further documentation of this remarkably talented and extended family. Joan, who wrote *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), had married into the family, as had Will Dyson, cartoonist on *The Bulletin* and the London *Daily Herald*, who married Norman's younger sister Ruby, herself an artist.

Together with Kenneth Slessor and Frank Johnson, Jack established a little magazine, *Vision*, which lasted four issues, expounding and expressing a new, vitalist aesthetic. The pasted-up copy of a fifth unpublished issue survives in Fisher Library at the University of Sydney. In reaction to the laconic economy of Henry Lawson, in reaction to the realist recording of an unappealing social reality, they sought a richer, glittering literary texture. Why shouldn't Australian literature have the jewels? It was an attempt to enrich, to create a self-conscious

‘culture’. It was in opposition to mercantile norms, but it was determined by the same socioeconomic system. It was producing identifiable commodities, identified as ‘art’. Its polar opposition to the philistine, material norms of the society was a flight away from social perception, from considering art in any social way. Its elitism and idealist denial of the social bases of culture were precisely the aesthetic that suited the preservation of the elite social structure. And its aesthetic was firmly anti-modernist. It saw modernism – the works of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence – as the expression of decadence. Australia, preserved from the wars of Europe and the materialist vulgarity of the United States of America, would be the clear space for a renaissance of classical vitality and innocence and purity in culture. The rich, punning, echoing language we can find in Joyce among the accepted pantheon of modernists; we can find the archaisms in Pound, the vortex of language in Wyndham Lewis, the return to the seventeenth-century lyric and Elizabethan drama in Eliot. But the mix that Lindsay and *Vision* were offering was different. ‘It was the difficult task set themselves by some Australian writers after the war to re-interpret colonial experience,’ wrote Stephen Murray-Smith in Geoffrey Dutton’s *Literature of Australia* (1964); Evan Jones wrote in the same volume, ‘at no other time have Australians had the confidence, so buoyantly expressed ... that they were the *übermenschen* of the cultural world ... the Western cultural heritage had fled a sickened Europe and a vulgar America’.

Jack Lindsay establishes the feel of the period by drawing on some stories he wrote at the time, and a novel he wrote about the period ten years later; the texture of the period is caught in the packed language. In the end Lindsay won through to a functional clarity which is the overall manner of the trilogy, a manner shaped by the needs of the work, the development of the thought, and the imparting of the necessary information. The new manner can encompass the manner of the old; the old manner could never have encompassed the manner of the new. And with a similar strategy he incorporates letters and comments from Lionel Lindsay, Ray Lindsay, and R. D. Fitzgerald. These different voices and different perspectives allow a modernist collage of a multiplicity of accounts.

*Vision* was one of the first of the ‘little magazines’ in Australia. John Tregenza begins with it in *Australian Little Magazines, 1923–54* (1964). Slessor in later years tended to distance himself from close involvement in the *Vision* world. ‘I wasn’t part of it. I was a very amused and detached observer. I can’t say I belonged to that

Bohemian world ... but I was able to observe some extraordinary characters – I think a lot more outrageous, more colourful, more humorous than their equivalent, the “beats” of today.”<sup>1</sup> Jack, Norman and Slessor all offered differing assessments of *Vision*’s role and nature in recollections contributed to *Southerly* in 1952–53, and these are collected in *Critical Essays on Kenneth Slessor*, edited by A. K. Thompson (1968). Some of Slessor’s memoirs of the period are collected in his *Bread and Wine* (1970), and Douglas Stewart discusses the *Vision* period in his life of Slessor, *A Man of Sydney* (1977). R. D. Fitzgerald’s recollections are in *Of Places and Poetry* (1975). And Philip Lindsay, Jack’s younger brother, was the first of the autobiographers with *I’d Live the Same Life Over* (1941).

In allying a literary impulse to Norman Lindsay’s visual aesthetic, *Vision*’s vitalist assertion was a focal point in Australian literary and cultural development. As Vincent Buckley wrote in *Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian* (1957):

It is an important strain in our modern poetry; it dominates in a direct way the first books of both Slessor and Fitzgerald. In a more indirect way, it has heavily influenced the poetry of Douglas Stewart and Kenneth Mackenzie, the poetry and prose of Eve Langley, even the work of Judith Wright and Brian Vrepon.

Slessor’s list of those influenced by Norman Lindsay’s ‘doctrine of poetic values’ also included Hugh McCrae, Rupert Atkinson, Leon Gellert, Jack Lindsay, Ronald McCuaig, Francis Webb, Louis Stone, Leslie Miller, Godfrey Blunden and Brian Penton. Christina Stead offers an external view in *For Love Alone* (1945); the magazine *Teresa* lends to Jonathan Crow is surely *Vision*:

Written and illustrated by the young artistic set in Sydney, run by the Brimley family, dominated by the Brimley family, in which, with imitations of Marlowe and Shakespeare, Donne and free verse, it was chiefly a question of free love and naked women; on each page were drawings of voluptuous, fat-faced, naked women, running away from a crowd of satyrs, carried off by centaurs or tempted by evil-eyed fauns ...

As well as *Vision*, Slessor and Jack edited a manifesto anthology, *Poetry in Australia, 1923*, with an introduction by Norman. The contributors included Jack, Slessor, Brennan, Shaw Neilson, McCrae, Fitzgerald, Gellert, Hugh McKay, and Dorothea Mackellar (known to generations as the author of ‘I love a sunburnt country’).

This is the world Jack recalls, these the publications, these the artists: Adolf

Beutler, Elioth Gruner, Guy Lynch and his brother Joe (whose death is the subject of Slessor's 'Five Bells'), David McKee Wright, Zora Cross, Les Robinson, George Finey, Unk White, Francis Croslé, Bertram Stevens and Hugh McKay. Jack's wife, Janet Beaton, was granddaughter of William Bede Dalley, made Australia's first Privy Councillor for despatching the Soudan contingent when he was premier of New South Wales in 1885. Dalley had been a friend of Henry Kendall and John Farrell. His sons, Will and John, were part of Norman's world. John Dalley wrote three novels, *No Armour* (1928), *Max Flambar* (1929) and *Only the Morning* (1930). The venues they haunted included Mockbell's chain of coffee shops, the Greek club in Park Street, Amendola's in Wilmot Street near the Liverpool Street Central Courts.

Frank Johnson introduced Jack to J. T. Kirtley who was interested in limited editions and fine press books, and who had just bought a Chandler and Price Bench-Platen press for £20. The first book printed was Jack's first book of poems, *Fauns and Ladies* (1923). In 1925 the press was named Fanfrolico, published Jack's translation of *Lysistrata*, and launched on the Lindsayan–Nietzschean vitalist path. In 1926 Jack and Kirtley invaded London. 'All that vindicates the human spirit, all that frankly, heroically or delightedly, faces the problem of life, all that allies fantasy with realism and defines the subtle and complex colour of earth and man; all such works have their place in [the Fanfrolico] aesthetic.'<sup>2</sup>

Jack's narrative and analysis of these years is, apart from its sheer enjoyability, basic to any account of the period. And cultural historians have all offered their versions of *Vision*: Judith Wright in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (1965), Robert Hughes in *The Art of Australia* (1970), John Docker in *Australian Cultural Elites* (1974) and Humphrey McQueen in *The Black Swan of Trespass* (1979).

When Kirtley returned to Australia, Jack was joined in London by P. R. Stephensen, who had edited the University of Queensland magazine *Galmahra*, in which one of Jack's poems had been found obscene by the university authorities. After Stephensen left, Jack was joined by Brian Penton, who wrote the novels *Landtakers* (1934) and *Inheritors* (1936), and by Philip Lindsay, his younger brother, on the verge of his career as novelist and screenwriter. Phil's baby daughter, glimpsed briefly, grew up in England and established herself as a novelist in the 1960s, Cressida Lindsay.

Fanfrolico published some forty titles and has a treasured role among fine press

collectors. The titles are described in Harry Chaplin's *The Fanfrolico Press* (1976) and in Will Ransom, *Private Presses and their Books* (1929), supplemented by William Ridler, *British Modern Press Books* (1971). Titles included Hugh McCrae's *Satyrs and Sunlight* (Douglas Stewart speculated that this edition was 'the only way to read him'), Slessor's *Earth Visitors*, Norman Lindsay's *Madam Life's Lovers*, Stephensen's version of Nietzsche's *Antichrist*, Jack's *Dionysos, or Nietzsche contra Nietzsche*, and Jack's poems, verse plays and translations of Petronius's *Satyricon* and Catullus, that became a staple of the press. They published an edition of Thomas Lovell Beddoes' poetry edited by Edmund Gosse, librarian of the House of Commons and author of that classic Victorian memoir, *Father and Son*; and of Cyril Tourneur's plays edited by Allardyce Nicholl, later professor of English at the University of Birmingham and founder of the Shakespeare Institute. It was this sumptuous edition that T. S. Eliot reviewed for his famous revaluation of Tourneur, collected in his *Selected Essays* (1932).

In England the darker side of Bohemia revealed itself further. Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* and Giacomo Puccini's opera have their tragic note. Whether they were caught up and tossed around by the force of the creative fire or sacrificed on the altar of male sexuality, Bohemia left its succession of victims. Jack's mother had been a warning from the world of artists in the first volume; Anna Brennan in volume two; Elza de Loche in volume three. Jack's scrupulous and agonising account of his relationship with Elza, of the exploration and understanding of sexual roles, social conditioning, and the attempt to rethink possibilities is an important document.<sup>3</sup>

Another Bohemian figure encountered was the musician and writer Philip Heseltine, also known as Peter Warlock, drawn in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* as Halliday and in Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* as Coleman. D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, August John, Nina Hamnett, Edgell Rickword, Harold Monroe, Norman Douglas, Basil Bunting, Robert Graves, Tom Driberg and the Australian expatriates Anna Wickham and Constant Lambert are among the figures glimpsed in this fine evocation of the period. And on the edges hashish, cocaine, ether, Aleister Crowley, sex-magic, espionage, the occult, and death.

Lindsay and Stephensen collaborated on a magazine, *The London Aphrodite*, named in response to J. C. Squire's *London Mercury*, carrying Australian writing and artwork into England. Contributors included Jack, Philip, Norman, Stephensen,

Penton, McCrae, Slessor, together with Australian expatriates W. J. Turner, Bertram Higgins and Rupert Atkinson and British writers Liam O'Flaherty, Rhys Davies, Philip Owens, and T. F. Powys. Jack declared in the first issue:

We stand for a point of view which equally outrages the modernist and the reactionary. It is certain that J. C. Squire and T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and Dean Inge, Humbert Wolfe and Robert Graves, e. e. cummings and Alfred Noyes, Jacques Maritain and James Douglas, Roger Fry and William Orpen would, if compelled by physical force to read our magazine, heartily (or at least irritatedly) dislike it.

The English were not wholly impressed. Aldous Huxley portrays Stephensen as Cuthbert Arkwright and Lindsay as Willy Weaver in *Point Counter Point* (1928):

[Arkwright] made his living, and in the process convinced himself that he was serving the arts, by printing limited and expensive editions of the more scabrous specimens of the native and foreign literatures. Blond, beef-red, with green and bulging eyes, his large face shining, he approached vociferating greetings. Willie Weaver jauntily followed, a little man perpetually smiling, spectacles astride his long nose, bubbling with good humour and an inexhaustible verbiage.

Stephensen later wrote his own account of the Fanfrolico years in *Kookaburras and Satyrs* (1954).<sup>4</sup>

A letter of D. H. Lawrence's dated 14 September 1929 confirms Lindsay's account of the plans to publish a volume of Lawrence's paintings.

Dear Mr Lindsay

Orioli wrote me from Florence that the Fanfrolico Press might do a portfolio of reproductions of my pictures, that hang now in Dorothy Warren's gallery. I think the idea is fun if you'd really care to do it. I would write a little introductory essay on painting, modern painting if you wished.

Would you let me know if you actually think of going on with the thing? I've heard of Fanfrolico from Rhys Davies – hope you're having a good time with it.

Yours sincerely

D. H. Lawrence.

Stephensen ran Mandrake Press for a while, wrote *The Legend of Aleister Crowley* and returned to Sydney to start Endeavour Press with the support of Norman Lindsay and the backing of *The Bulletin*. He left it after a year and established his

own imprint, and in 1935 *The Australian Mercury*, which survived only one issue. Frank Johnson's own imprint published all Slessor's major poetry in Australia. Hal Porter recalls in *The Paper Chase* (1966) sending his stories to Norman Lindsay, 'a young man's sort of deity in 1932', and 'P. R. Stephensen, to whom Lindsay has passed on some of my poems ... dashes off letters on the startling orange writing-paper of *The Australian Mercury*, a one-issue-only publication, telling me that my work is "ideally suited to a *real* literary magazine". And have I £200 to finance such a magazine?' It can look like a succession of disasters, comedies, absurdities. Yet it was through these short-lived Australian presses and magazines that Australian writers emerged and remained in print. It was through the energies of Johnson, Kirtley, Stephensen and the Lindsays that works of Kenneth Slessor, Brian Penton, Miles Franklin, Eleanor Dark, Hugh McCrae, Henry Handel Richardson, Xavier Herbert and Norman, Philip and Jack Lindsay and many others were published. According to Norman Lindsay it was Brian Penton who at this time 'seduced me into publishing a novel' by taking off the manuscript of *Redheap* to England, where it was published in 1930 – and a further ten very popular, very successful works of fiction by Norman followed into print.

In 1936 Stephensen joined with W. J. Miles in *The Publicist*, 'the paper loyal to Australia first'. Stephensen's involvement in the Australia First movement, a right-wing, nationalist organisation, led to his being interned in 1942 for three and a half years. Kirtley, a *Publicist* contributor, was interned for two years. Bruce Muirden describes the episode in *The Puzzled Patriots* (1968). Nietzsche, vitalism and nationalism had led towards fascism. Stephensen and Kirtley were not rare in their sympathies. T. S. Eliot, Charles Maurras, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Henri de Montherlant, Henry Williamson, Roy Campbell, W. B. Yeats, Céline, Pirandello, d'Annunzio and many other writers were all at some stage attracted to aspects of Nazism and fascism, but they were rare in paying the price of internment.

In England Jack withdrew from the literary world and underwent a profound period of self-analysis and fasting, to come to understand his relationship with Elza, and to understand his relationship with Norman and Norman's socio-cultural beliefs. 'At the crucial point, reached round the New Year of 1936, the new balance triumphantly asserted itself as a definitely organised system, and I found it was Marxism.' One of the first works to issue from this new orientation was *John Bunyan* (1937). Its pioneering strength has been attested by the historian Christopher Hill,

though it is best known to generations of literary students from the attack on it by F. R. Leavis collected in *The Common Pursuit* (1952):

Bunyan, according to Mr Lindsay, 'wanted to get outside the cramping, distorting social discord of his day into the fuller life of fellowship.' Though Mr Lindsay talks of 'fuller life' he proffers emptiness; like most Marxist writers who undertake to explain art and culture, he produces the effect of having emptied life of content and everything of meaning. It is impossible in any case to believe that the classless society produced by the process that the Marxist's history has determined on could have a cultural content comparable with that represented by *The Pilgrims Progress*.

We are into the political polarisations of the late thirties, the foundations of the cold war anti-communism of the nineteen-fifties. And what Leavis found it impossible to believe, Jack Lindsay has always continued to believe. And Jack's vision of human fulfilment and human possibility, his sense of the dialectic of change, his understanding of historical process and the creative spirit have shaped the great achievement of the works that now ensued – novels, essays, and biographical and critical studies of writers and artists.<sup>5</sup>

Published in one volume for the first time, Jack's autobiographical trilogy gains in impact. We see the full sweep of movement, the romantic poet leaving Brisbane for Sydney, then for London, going through processes of understanding, regaining and then breaking free from the father, coming under enchantments, coming to self-knowledge. Here are the archetypal, the mythic materials: the portrait of the artist as a young man, the scenes from Bohemian life, the figures of tragic ruin. But though it is a story of struggle, of confusion, of emergence, of change, it is not a story of lost illusions. It is the story of coming through. The narrative ends at the end of the thirties, at the beginning of the first of the new periods of Lindsay's maturity, at that point at which E. Morris Miller characterised him in *Australian Literature: From its Beginnings to 1935* (1940): 'Probably the most versatile of the younger generation of Australian authors.'

Introduction to Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*, Penguin, Ringwood and London, 1982.



## Jack Lindsay, *The Blood Vote*

*The Blood Vote* (University of Queensland Press, 1987) is a novel of the anti-conscription movement in Australia in World War I. Set in Brisbane, it powerfully evokes the sense of place and time, and the urgency of the struggle. It provides a powerful counter-myth to the dominant, militaristic myths of Anzac, and records the strong oppositional note in Australian society. *The Blood Vote* is Jack Lindsay's only adult novel set in Australia, though his autobiographical trilogy *Life Rarely Tells* draws on some of the same material. A major, missing work in the unexplored tradition of the Australian political novel, this is that rare thing in modern Australian writing, a novel of ideas.

*The Good Reading Guide*, ed. Helen Daniel, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1989.

# Christina Stead

Christina Stead died in March 1983. She was a great writer. There is no place for any qualifying 'of our time' or 'woman' or 'Australian'. Her work endures.

Her novels were firmly realist. They were based on the careful observation of people and life situations. Their invention lay in the discovery of the significant and the form in social relationships. She did not write fabricated fictions. The resonances emerge from the selection and recording of the actual. I mentioned to her once I had taken a critic around the locale of *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone*: Watson's Bay, The Gap, the military camp on South Head. He had been amazed to see that the locales he had read as metaphorical, symbolic, were drawn from the specific, the actual, the material. She remarked: 'But the thing that does interest me in critics' reports is that they do in fact live in a world of fantasy. It is the writers who are the scientists.'<sup>1</sup>

But if realism was her mode, spontaneity was her method. Like D. H. Lawrence or Jack Kerouac, her writing was inspirational, spontaneous. She was possessed by the spirit. She rarely revised. She wrote *The House of All Nations*, that great novel of international finance that takes its name from a famous Parisian brothel, in some incredibly short time in Spain: six weeks, I think. Peter Davies offered to publish it if she would revise, edit, cut. 'I can't,' she said. So they published it as written. A rare example of a publisher accepting a writer's intuition.

She was a writer of the Left. Her first novel, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, examined the destructive effects of poverty, economic, psychological, spiritual. During the 1930s she contributed to *Left Review* and *New Masses*. She was amongst those who publicly opposed fascism in Spain. Her husband William Blake was a Marxist economist who worked in banking.<sup>2</sup> He wrote novels: *The World is Mine*, *The Painter and the Lady*. The latter was dedicated to the memory of Ralph Fox, killed in action at Cordoba. Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the People* is the one critical book Christina recommended that I should read. In the 1970s I invited her to contribute to an anthology opposing American and Australian involvement in Viet Nam, *We Took Their Orders and Are Dead*.<sup>3</sup> She wrote a moving piece especially for the volume.

Some time later she wrote apologising for the state of her typescript; she had been in some pain writing it and hadn't been able to retype it; it turned out she had suffered a heart attack, but had kept on writing.

Her opposition to exploitation pervades all her work, whether the exploitation is economic, sexual or familial. She resisted the appropriation of her work to narrowly feminist readings. The capitalist, imperialist and military exploitations were the primary exploitations that had yet to be effectively confronted, resisted and removed. I remember lunching with her in London in 1972 when an old friend of hers accused her of being an unrepentant Stalinist. She pointed out that he had followed the classic path of Trotskyite become small capitalist. This was her political milieu, a world of political argument, that the Cold War of the 1950s tried to crush. She and her husband left McCarthyite America and lived in Europe and England. Like so many writers of the left, she suffered during this time. After *The People with the Dogs* in 1952 no new fiction appeared until *Cotters' England* in 1966. She and her husband were very poor. She did some translations, and some reviewing for the *Times Literary Supplement*. I once tried to collect these reviews with a view to republication; someone at the *TLS* told me it was impossible to identify unsigned reviews and it would take too long to explain why it was impossible.

Her vision was a positive one. She would not accept any women's movement view of men as the enemy, she liked men. 'I am not a tractarian of that sort; and it has somehow hopped on to me.' She would not accept any leftist blanket anti-Americanism: she admired the spirit of resistance of the American people, the radical commitment to human liberation in the United States, despite all governmental and corporate repressions. She felt Australians should know more about the USA. 'But with the Americans having so much influence now in Australia and using our men for their wars it would not be a bad idea for Australians to know something about this great, fierce, turbulent, gifted and dangerous country', she wrote in 1972.

Her life was a private one. I once proposed publishing a volume collecting the various interviews she had given over the years. She was horrified. She regretted them all. But she continued to give interviews, she did not make herself inaccessible. She was generous with her time and friendship. She is deeply missed by all who knew her. And her work remains, her vision is there to be shared now and in all the future generations.

*Australian Literary Studies*, 11, 1983.

# Christina Stead's Australian Novels

Christina Stead was born in Rockdale, New South Wales in 1902; in 1928, when she was twenty-six, she left Sydney. For most of her life she lived in Europe and America. As an expatriate she received little critical notice or readership in Australia, and it was only in 1965 that her books began to be published in the country of her birth.<sup>1</sup> 'Her association with Australia is thus incidental to her career abroad,' Frederick Macartney wrote in 1956.<sup>2</sup> It is a questionable statement, since arguably her formative years were spent in Australia, and the material for her novels comes very much from them. Randall Jarrell, in his introduction to *The Man Who Loved Children* (London, 1966), remarked on 'her having created from an Australian memory an American reality'. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* is set wholly in Australia, as is over half of *For Love Alone*. R. G. Geering in his introduction to the former points out that there are stories with Australian settings in *The Salzburg Tales*: he claims there are only four – 'The Triskelion', 'Morpeth Tower', 'On the Road', and 'Day of Wrath'; but 'Silk-shirt' is surely set in Sydney – in an office in 'Bridge Street' next to 'the park, which is a triangle, and small enough to put in one's pocket'; a tramp in the park even says 'It is cold, mate'. And 'Fair Women' (with its references to kangaroo grass, gullies and boundary riders) and the Centenarist's first tale on the sixth day seem also to have Australian settings.

*Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone* can profitably be discussed together, not merely because they share an Australian setting, but because they have thematic concerns in common, and because the later book to some degree restates the themes of the earlier one, and offers a development from them. The Australian settings – mainly of Sydney – are emphasised in both, and sometimes seem a restriction when documentation becomes a substitute for creation. In *Seven Poor Men*, for instance, we find 'Catherine left him at the word, swung down Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park. She had a room in an old building in Elizabeth Street ...' (137); 'Baruch lived in a room on the fourth floor back, in a side street in Woolloomooloo Flat, not far from the old public school. His window commanded the Inner Domain, the Art Gallery, the spires of St. Mary's Cathedral and the Elizabeth Street skyline' (138).

The same sort of thing recurs in *For Love Alone*:

She divided the walking into stages, which became more and more numerous. To reach the Law School, up Phillip Street, where Jonathan had spent a year, was one stage: then the Law Courts, where he could never plead, because he had no property, was the second, and the old Girl's High School was a third; then came the long stretch by Hyde Park; then the moment when she smelled Tooth's brewery, Mark Foy's on the right hand, a bazaar on its own *piazza* ... (258)

Even for a reader who knows Sydney, these passages hardly succeed; the need to create a mental map, to correlate names with street signs, dissipates the attention. To someone unfamiliar with the city, the details can only be boring. They are not at all evocative; they are supported by hardly any description or imaging. The streets and views may have been meaningful to Christina Stead, but nothing is communicated to the reader except a provincial lack of proportion, a lack of realisation that places need to be created, not just names; the centre of one's own world is not the world's centre.

It is something of a paradox that the cosmopolitan expatriate – as she has tended to be viewed by Australian critics – should show what seems to be such provincialism. It cannot be explained as prentice work since the features appear not only in her first novel, but in *For Love Alone*, which was her fifth. Macartney, noting that *Seven Poor Men* is her only novel set wholly in Australia, adds a rider – 'though the references to the locale are overlaid by her intellectual grotesquerie.' The 'though' sounds disappointed – but rather than agreeing with such disappointment, we might argue that the 'references to the locale' are successfully imagined only when they are so overlaid.

It is this grotesquerie that marks Christina Stead as so distinctive a writer. She uses the setting of Sydney in the depression, but makes of it far more than her social-realist contemporaries could. Certainly she is concerned with the social-realist aspects of poverty; the provincialism of the place-naming is perhaps an attempt to establish a 'real' setting; and she deals with the social aspects of poverty, the economic factors determining it. But her picturing of the streets of depression transcends the merely limited socio-economic, historic reportage. She is brilliantly successful when, from the documentation of cartography, she reaches out to a phantasmagoria:

They reached the less-frequented regions, they turned out of the shopping districts down by Paddy's Market and the Technical High School. Most of the

shops were closed. Three young men with hats in their hands played leap-frog outside a closed bar. A pool of blood on the pavement, with several clots, made them look around: opposite were two streets in which were houses of ill-fame – a fight between bucks, a girl having a baby, a bleeding nose? They walked on, the light gradually becoming less, crossing and recrossing the road, dodging the little traffic. They were fatigued now. Baruch had walked for some minutes without talking, looking very pale, limping slightly. They stopped to breathe outside a lolly-shop brightly lighted, in which were purple, mauve and red boxes of chocolates with gilt filigree paper. Going with one of those under your arm to a red plush parlour, a daguerreotyped aunt in a red plush frame, to a girl: looking at the boxes Joseph had an affection for all girls ...

A well-dressed girl came up with them and passed them; she hesitated, looked at Joseph and walked on a few steps ahead, the high heels tapping impatiently, marking time. She turned down a side street; who knows? They have to earn their living. How did she know Joseph had just been paid? A broken ostrich-feather, pale blue and grey, lay on the pavement under an open window on the second floor; in the window was a pink blind drawn, on which a woman's head-dress darkly moved. They passed a lighted entrance, with polished handle, varnished door, and two whitened steps.

Baruch was silent. Who knows? thought Joseph. (121)

It is like a nightmare in the random detail, the wordlessness of the walk, the prostitute approaching and moving away, wordlessly, like a wraith in the underworld; the only sound her high heels. The colours are all vivid, garish – and fluctuating, just as the light changes, just as Baruch and Joseph cross and recross roads. The images all have a potential menace – the blood, the silhouetted head-dress – and so have the actions – the prostitute's uncanny knowledge that Joseph had just been paid; and the menace is heightened by the absurdity – the men playing leap-frog of all things, the inappropriate ostrich feather in that street. The passage loses by being abbreviated and taken out of context, since the effects are cumulative. By accretion and aggregation the grotesquerie is established, and Ultimo becomes an image of Hell. It is this accretion of the macabre and odd that is so effective – far more remarkable than the stream-of-consciousness tricks ('Going with one of those ...') which for all their evidence of unprovinciality in Christina Stead's writing, are evidence, too, of a limiting 'literariness'.

Teresa's walks through the same poverty in *For Love Alone* are organised on the same principle of accretion of detail; there is less colour, less richness though, for her nightmare is different. Saving money to go to England to join the man she thinks she loves, her life becomes exhausted, pinched, pale:

Wherever she walked, something of bluish-white with long stride came after her a pace away, bowed forward, not malignant, only natural, but that bluish-white thing of her own was Exhaustion itself. (277)

Here the grotesquerie has led to allegorisation and Gothicising – a tendency always present in these novels, and running riot in the fantasy and whimsy of *The Salzburg Tales*. In the novels her control is firmer; even such shamelessly Poe-like Romantic touches as Kol Blount's hearing Michael's voice calling him in a dream as Michael is committing suicide, are carried off in *Seven Poor Men*.

The problem in the novels is not that of the grotesquerie becoming wildly Romantic, but of becoming boring, of becoming not macabre but dully descriptive:

The tram ride cost only twopence, so that it might seem folly to wear oneself out in this way, but she was afraid to give in on any count and in some ways the endless walking, walking, meant England. She was walking her way to England. In three years to the day, less Sunday and Christmas Day and one or two other holidays, she would have walked 2,772 miles and by the time she sailed she would have walked just 3,000 miles. But on the other hand these three thousand miles represented seventeen pounds, three shillings and fourpence and perhaps a bit more, saved to take abroad. (278)

Teresa is tired and exhausted, but so is the writing. There is no imaginative richness in the passage, nothing made of the mathematical calculations. They are merely listed; and the prose has an unimaginative repetitiousness – 'the endless walking, walking, meant England. She was walking her way to England.' Christina Stead is not always firmly enough in control of the accretion of detail, not firmly enough in control of the prose, to prevent Tess's purgatory from becoming the reader's too. We are as relieved as Tess when forty pages after Jonathan's departure she has stopped walking and sailed to London.

The less Christina Stead strives for realism, the more successful she often is, because her realistic mode drops too easily to mere listing (of place names or objects) or to an imaginative thinness. In the course of their walk, Joseph and Baruch meet Winter, librarian of the Communist Party. He represents the socio-economic aspect of the novel's concern with poverty – but his portrayal, mainly dependent on an attempted representation of Australian demotic, is woefully clumsy.

'That's what's the matter,' said Winter bitterly, 'yew orter hate the upper classes; they're our natural enemy. Can you imagine chaps goin' to war and sittin' in the front trenches and sayin', 'I haven't got any warrior feelin', I love the Huns

like I love my brother.' Suppose yew do, yew get shell-shock, or yew desert, or yew fraternise on yer own before the rest o' the army's ready, or yew get safe through the war and for the rest o' yer life tell the folks back home that the system is wrong, but the Huns are nice people. No, yew got to be uncommunist towards the capitalist.' (125)

Certainly the Communist Party is meant to be shown as equally oppressed by the poverty it wants to end as everything and everyone else in the book; certainly the likelihood of its achieving anything is strongly questioned – especially by the portrayal of the Folliotts, the English middle-class Marxists dabbling with politics but returning to England when they receive an inherited income. But Winter becomes not merely an example of another poor man, not merely an example of the Party member, but a low-life caricature, and it is a literary caricature, rather than one from observation; no one else has speech rendered in this quasi-phonetic way in the novel.

There is a disjunction in *Seven Poor Men* ultimately between the overall theme and organisation of the book (poverty), and the individual successful imaginative passages, between the Romantic and the low-life caricature. Randall Jarrell has praised Christina Stead's style for 'its structural variety, its rhythmical spontaneity', but there is not a strong enough structure of action, plot or image to make a total unity of the disparate elements of *Seven Poor Men*. And the disjunction leads to a sort of compartmentalisation in treatment of characters. Winter, for instance, is limited because he is shown only in this socio-economic context; similarly the young theorist, Baruch Mendelssohn, is presented mainly as someone who gives long, and tedious, analyses of the social and political situation: whereas Michael and Catherine are given a much fuller characterisation, yet hardly fitted into the socio-economic aspect of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

And Christina Stead is much more successful with the bizarre or the Romantic than with the naturalistic; she fails with Winter and even with Mendelssohn. But the brilliance of the portrayal of Michael Bagenault is of a different order, there is a richness of psychological presentation, as well as of the macabre or grotesque.

Michael's violence and cruelty, and his other-worldly weirdness which may be of insight or of delusion, are suggested in the beautiful opening chapter describing his growing up. The hints of cruelty, and the hints of the sexual involvement with his half-sister are caught in a fine glimpse:



He assumed that his sister Catherine, called Kate, had told on him. 'Kate has a boy,' he said. Kate slapped his face and punched him on the temple, which hurt very much; in return he hit her on her budding breast. She tripped him up and punneled him all over the face, her own face purple with fury. (6)

His fantasies are caught, too – he talks at school of wanting to fly:

And when he sat at home later and looked up the green and yellow hill where the school sat, and the road home with its houses and bits of bush, he wished that he could see himself on the road home, where he had been a few minutes before. He pretended that images of himself were still marching along every stage of that much-travelled road, and would have liked to see them from this distance, familiar manikins. (7)

But his dizziness, his dreams 'that he was suffocating or being attacked by bears, or being followed by gigantic funereal phantoms' (14), his speculations – all these that so brilliantly establish his personality, have little to do with the novel's central theme. Nor has one of the novel's most memorable episodes – when Michael hears his mother telling a priest that Michael is illegitimate. It is a superb piece of macabre grotesque humour. 'The priest's traitless face showed a shade of interest, malice, revenge and victory.' He asks Mrs Bagenault to visit him at the church that afternoon:

'Ah, the bastard,' said Michael to himself, 'he won't get her: I'll stop her.'

'Ah-ha, a bastard,' said the priest to himself; 'I'll get her, nothing will stop her.'

He got up with a satisfied air. She fumbled around in her dress, the woman, her neat hair slightly disordered, her eyes with their swollen tear-sacs, suffused. She looked older than she had a few minutes before. The priest full of spite and pride walked slowly down the garden path along the roses. 'So that's the way the land lies,' he said to himself. 'Look at those roses, those French beans: very nice. So that's how the husband got his touch of satire: well, foh, foh, it's always the same. These meek dames and meek husbands, the devil gets into one or the other with great ease.' He looked at the roses with a vicious smile, as if he accused them for the soft effusion of their unreligious saps.

'Not bad,' said he.

Michael was joyful. (21)

An amazing passage – Michael's reaction is surprising yet so right – it gets much of its effect from the comic mannerism. 'Foh, foh' suggests the 'fee fi fo fum' of the childhood ogre, the inversion of 'said he' suggests again a ballad; and the whole

scene, Michael hiding and overhearing, and the parallelism of his and the priest's silent words, has the tone of grotesque, macabre farce; while the imagery is ironically sexual, the traditionally vaginal roses, the phallic beans (French ones, too), and the secretions of 'unreligious saps'.

The organisation of Christina Stead's novels is not conventional. Various critics have indicated the lack of plot in *Seven Poor Men*; but lack of plot does not necessarily imply lack of structure. The novel deals with the lives of seven poor men, all of whom are connected by friendship, work, or family; the connections, though, are shaky and other characters – such as Michael's sister, or the Folliotts, or Montagu the financier – are at least as important as some of the seven. What unity the novel has comes not from plot (there isn't one), nor from character relationship, but from the theme stated in the title – poverty. It is this, the varieties of poverty, its different effects, that provides the organisation – so that the novel can be seen almost as a meditation on poverty. And the meditation is not restricted to the economic manifestations – Chamberlain's printing works for instance; the way poverty determines and limits lives not merely economically, but also culturally, mentally and sexually, is the book's concern. We can say that Michael is a born misfit, is created as a melancholic and irrational child; but poverty subdues him, too, plays on his character to lead him to his final destruction. The social-realist novel has tended too often to deal with the 'normal' individual oppressed by the economic and social environment; Christina Stead extends the analysis to show the abnormal similarly, indeed worse, afflicted.

*Seven Poor Men* ends on a note of despair, as if poverty has defeated all the characters: Michael has committed suicide, Winter is sick and perhaps dying, Catherine is in a mental hospital, Chamberlain is ruined. There are notes of hope, but they are not strong ones: there is a suggestion that the cripple Kol may be cured, but it is only a maybe; Joseph marries – but the suggestion is that he is being trapped by his environment, and his wife is hardly mentioned; Baruch Mendelssohn goes to America – but it is as much a running-away as making a new life, a confession that Australia cannot be altered, that social justice must be fought for somewhere else. No one achieves fulfilment.

*For Love Alone*, retreading the same ground, does offer a development from the same situation. Poverty is still an omnipresent force for the first three-fifths of the book, but it is now presented as not totally determining. There are other aspects of

life that are influentially and motivationally important. There were in *Seven Poor Men*, too: the thematic frame would not contain some of the imaginative aspects of the novel such as the incest motif. *For Love Alone*, likewise organised by theme, has its theme stated in the title, too. Poverty now becomes a background for the exploration of love. It is a theme perhaps more suited to Christina Stead's abilities: her grotesqueries superbly established some aspects of the poverty she was describing, but her failure with the social and political aspects of the theme weakened *Seven Poor Men*: they were aspects that needed to be established for a theme of poverty. With love – and especially with an adolescent girl's imaginings about love – fantasy, nightmare, grotesquerie are a manner more fully appropriate, and a less adequate grasp of naturalism can be concealed.

*For Love Alone* may initially seem to be organised on plot – telling the story of Teresa Hawkins's life at home, her first love, her journey to England, her disillusion, despair and true love. But such an account would have to concede numerous excrescences and imbalances. The opening chapter, for instance, a superb portrayal of Tess's father, establishes him as vain and egotistic, demanding an audience from his family, narrating a monologue of his sensual successes:

'I have always been admired for my beautiful white skin,' said the goldenhaired man, reminiscently. 'Women love it in a man, it surprises them to see him so much fairer in colour than they are. Especially the darkies,' and he looked frankly at Kitty Hawkins, who was a nut-brown brunette with drooping black hair. 'But not only the dark ones,' he went on softly. He kept on coaxing. 'I have been much loved; I didn't always know it – I was always such an idealist ...' (5–6)

Hawkins's blindly egotistic portrayal of his own egotism is a brilliant *tour de force*. Hawkins, though, is only a minor figure in the novel henceforth. His being established in the novel in such fullness here would be a structural flaw, if character and plot were the structural organising elements. In a novel organised thematically around love-sex-sensuality, though, the establishment of this sort of attitude can be seen as basic to the structure of theme and tone. Similarly, Tess's visit to her relations' farm, and the sexual problems, the engagement, of her cousin there, would seem excrescent if the novel were organised plot-wise on a sequence of the events of Tess's life. If, however, we see that the section adds another term to the meditation on love-sex-marriage (and a term, certainly, that Teresa has to take into account),

then the structure can be recognised as quite carefully organised. In the same way Jonathan Crow's fury that his brother marries, trapped by a woman he does not love, hardly relates to the story of Tess's life; but it has thematic point – in showing the way poverty degrades and oppresses its victims (relating to the subordinate theme of the novel), and with the marriage trap presents another aspect of the primary theme. The excessive emotional reaction of Jonathan shows of course, something of his unbalanced nature – shows, too, his sexual hysteria. His obsessions, his sexual neuroses become clearer to the reader (though not to Tess). Christina Stead can economically use her episodes for multiple purposes.

The creation of an external world of narrated event, of external causality (the social-realist axis, as it were) is only a minor purpose in these novels. More important is the meditation on the chosen theme, and the narration of the psychological life of the characters. Events are selected to establish not the outer world of external causality, but the causality and causal connections of psychological states. Returning to Hawkins's egotistic monologue, we can see how this, and nineteen years of it, should affect the sexual and emotional nature of Tess. With Jonathan's obsessive reaction to his brother's marriage (he refuses to let his mother attend the wedding), we see an external manifestation of his inner state. It is the psychological drama, psychological cause and effect, that concern Christina Stead.

The earlier claim that the organising pattern of these novels is thematic, might now be augmented by the claim that it is 'psychological' too. She is interested in character psychology, but she draws also from the symbolism of Freudian psychology, and the incidents of the casebook, for organising images and events. Examples are pervasive. Jonathan, for instance, remarks that 'girls can pass Vesuvius in eruption and talk about frills and flounces.' (300) But there are also events such as the encounter with Mrs Percy, the wife whose husband is in a mental hospital; Tess meets her for only one chapter early in the novel:

Teresa began to talk rapidly and brilliantly, quite beside herself, in apprehensive frolic; she talked about her Latin teacher, Mr Crow, about her ambitions, and for some reason, said that Mr Crow believed in free love and was discussing it in the suburbs. She felt that Mrs Percy was not easy. The older woman rose suddenly and begged the girl to excuse her, saying she was tired; the girl must pardon her, she had so many headaches that she had had to give up reading altogether, she who had been so fond of reading, just as fond as Teresa herself. This brought Teresa to a stop and she thought back

over what she had said. She could scarcely remember it, but no doubt she must have said something which called up the 'reading' remark. (34–5)

The subconscious substitution of reading for sexual intercourse comes straight from the analyst's case history. But the incident is not merely an example of the sources of Christina Stead's character portrayal; it is an example again of an incident irrelevant to any but the most loosely and incoherently picaresque of novels, yet fully relevant to the thematic structure of love-sex-marriage, and to the psychological portrayal of Teresa; the whole visit to Mrs Percy is, like the visit to her cousin, another influence determining the extent of her fears and fantasies, determining the investment she has in finding someone on whom to pour her love, so that she will not be left alone.

*For Love Alone* is more successful than *Seven Poor Men* very much because its organising theme is one more suitable to Christina Stead's talents. The grotesquerie is appropriate to Teresa's fantasies: the old man following her along the bush track with his penis hanging exposed is an incident both relevant to her preoccupations with love and sex, and homogeneous with the fantasies and daydreams that she has – though more explicit than those she allows herself. But it is not merely that the grotesque or macabre or fantastic is more appropriate – it is appropriate and successful for aspects of the poverty theme, too; more important, *For Love Alone* does not have the disjunction between theme and realisation of the earlier novel. Randall Jarrell's remark on *The Man Who Loved Children* of 'her regular ability to make the scenes that matter most the book's best imagined and best realised scenes' could be applied to *For Love Alone* but not to *Seven Poor Men*. The memorable episodes of *For Love Alone* are all part of the love-sex-marriage theme. And the social-naturalistic aspects, too, are generally more successful; the second chapter shows Tess and her sister at a wedding – and the social observation of sweating aunts and nieces in the heat, the sexual innuendo of the conversations, the terror of sex, of being left on the shelf, of illegitimate children, the whole complex of fears, combine to make this firmly observed social picture as nightmarish as any of the fantastic elements. And Kitty's decision to leave home to work for a widower as his housekeeper, forced by poverty and fear of spinsterhood, hopeful of marrying him in due course, creates clearly both the sexual fears and the economic pressures at work. Tess asks:

'Are you going to try to marry Bayliss?'

Kitty stopped rolling some clumsy garment and sat down, looking at her sister across the landing. Her attitude said yes, eloquently, but she did not dare to say it.

‘He’s quite old.’

‘I don’t know any young men,’ said Kitty. She bent her face to her work. ‘I had no dresses, I had nothing.’ She began to cry. (270–1)

Poverty is still pervasive in *For Love Alone*, and this, and the same settings (Watson’s Bay, Sydney University, Broadway, Circular Quay, the Harbour) emphasise the similarities with *Seven Poor Men*. But poverty is here not the supreme determinant, the totality of existence. Tess’s brothers and sisters are dragged down by it, or by the hard work to avoid it. But Jonathan Crow, who teaches Tess in a night school, is a slum child who has struggled his way to and through the university to escape from the degradation and destruction of poverty. He seems someone who will escape, and Tess channels all her fantasies of love onto him, and when he leaves for England, she saves for three years in order to afford the fare to join him.

Christina Stead has attempted something very difficult with Crow, presenting him as the struggling young man for our sympathy, as someone who is not content, as is Tess’s father, to lapse into poverty and apathy. Having done this, she risks suggesting that Crow is not a first-rate mind, but essentially mediocre, distinguished mainly in application and hard work. When we first see him addressing his class, we are doubtful of her success in portraying an ‘intellectual’; but this is not a failure – for Crow is no intellectual, but merely a magpie gathering flashy ideas, ideas yeasted by his own sexual obsessions. His crankiness recalls the ‘mumbo-jumbo religion widespread among women in small houses’ (59) that the cranky Mrs Percy advocates to Tess. So we see him with a double vision – in Tess’s fantasy, and in our own observation. It is not until Tess has been in England for some time that she comes to a realisation of Crow’s worthlessness. He is, in fact, not someone freed from poverty by the intellect and study, but someone destroyed, like her family, like the figures in *Seven Poor Men*, by it. His fears, his need of security, his need to scramble after every opportunity lest he fall back into the abyss, his fears of rejection by women, his fears of rejection by those with money, his fears of entanglements with women leading to the destruction of his career and a plunge back into poverty – all these have made him the tortured neurotic he is. His ideas are the product of

his neuroses; he never has the security to be able to examine them dispassionately, to dare to risk the intelligence of questioning them. His character is caught brilliantly, cruelly. Tess in England in a moment of good humour

began to put on airs, to imitate the haughty accent of some people she had heard passing, a succession of groans, sighs, yawns and lisps, according to her; meanwhile Jonathan looked at her attentively, opened his eyes and remarked: 'That is the first time I've heard you speak really well.' (329)

Evil as Crow is – there are melodramatic Satanic touches to him as Tess begins to realise how she has been misled – he is presented with a superb understanding. He is one of the finest pictures of someone who in trying to escape from the poverty of his background is destroyed unwittingly by himself. He nearly destroys Tess – but he is as much a victim himself. Tess though is saved; Quick, the wealthy, cultured, literary, handsome American financier employs her, rescues her from her decision to die, and gives her love. Crow's part in this should not be ignored, though; if it had not been for him and his determination to escape from the Sydney slums, Tess would never have escaped from the world of the *Seven Poor Men*. Her dependence on and disillusion with Crow is a necessary part of her ultimate saving. Then Quick offers her the panacea for all her problems – love and money.

It sounds romantic, summarised; yet it is no more a romantic resolution to the situation than Michael's suicide and Catherine's breakdown in *Seven Poor Men*. But the important thing is that the resolution is not a static one; whereas the earlier novel ends in a uniform despair or defeat, the ending of *For Love Alone* is open. Tess after living with Quick for a while begins to live again ('You've restored me to life'); and though Quick may be a romantic wealthy socialist, kind to waiters and knowledgeable about economics, Tess's future is not assured and made perfect by his merely being there; restored to life, she begins to develop her own needs, her own desires and demands.

They threw themselves on the bed to talk and here, in the half-light, in unchecked intimacy, Teresa began to tell him about herself, what her feelings really were in this honeymoon and how she felt now that she had the whip and check-rein in her hands – he went cold, so cold, that she felt the warmth dying out of his breast; he lay like a dying man. She realised her mistake, with a pinching of the heart, and at once abandoned the thought of telling him the truth about her love. (459)

The relationship between Tess and Quick, then, is not the end of the story, nor is it presented as a final satisfaction. At the end of the novel she spends a night with one of Quick's friends; when she returns to Quick

'I love you very much and never anyone else,' she said. After the episode of the first days when she felt her life would be a secret from him, she had felt lonely, unkind, and oppressed by him, who, however, said he would die for her. Now, with a secret that would perhaps kill his love, she felt able to give to him freely, unforced; she had lost nothing and would never have anything to regret. She thought 'How miserable I would have been if I had had to go on for years, wondering whether I should love another man! But now I know, this is the only love, but not the first and not the last. I will now know how to make myself a life apart. If James robbed me, I would dislike him for my empty heart, but as I know how to cultivate my heart and mind in secret, now, I can only love him for giving himself to me.' (495–6)

From the same world of the *Seven Poor Men* a solution has in this later novel developed. Poverty and its spiritual despair can be escaped; the escape – like Mendelssohn's ambiguous one – demands a flight; but the flight leads to a solution in *For Love Alone*. And the solution offered is one that avoids being sentimental – as Quick at first seemed to be – because it is not a solution offered as a simple, final answer. What Quick has given Tess is not an answer; instead, he has given her the conditions requisite for finding her own answer. Her life begins from here, rather than ending 'happily ever after' in marriage. He appears as something of a fairy godfather, but the wand he waves does not end the drama. While Teresa is saved from poverty and despair romantically, even unrealistically, the sentimentality of that is qualified and repudiated by the presentation of her new life as a new life to develop, one only just beginning, one posing new problems; they will need new decisions, new resolutions – or another fairy godfather.

*Southerly*, 27, 1967. Reprinted in Jean C. Stine and Daniel G. Marowski, ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 32, Gale Research, Detroit, 1986.



## Christina Stead, *Cotters' England*

*Cotters' England* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1967) is a weird, disturbing, memorable mélange of what seem, listed, to be quite disparate elements. They are elements recurrent in Christina Stead's writing: poverty, socialism, pressures exerted on its members by a family, intense brother-sister relationship, sexual involvements and exploitations, fantastic anecdotes. Realistic properties – concerns with jobs, with food, with economies – are presented in combination with the grotesque and weird. There is documentary observation: Ma Hatchard 'had fixed her lodgers' rooms up completely, with each a little oven and stove, and good lights, each item on a separate meter. The meters ate up the pennies, sixpences and shillings. There was a regular rake-off for the landlady on each meter.' But it is surprising to find a novel containing such material as well as this strange scene. – 'A number of naked women were rounding, breaking, wrestling, weaving together in the backyard between the brick walls, the high fence and the tree. The moonlight showed that some were rosy in the daytime, others were the colours of night-lighted fish ...' Yet the combination of these strands surprisingly and mysteriously results in a unity and coherence.

What the unity is – in terms of theme, or plot – is elusive of paraphrase. An essential element is the brilliant portrayal of the central character, Nellie Cotter, a middle-aged journalist on a socialist paper, married to a trade-unionist now involved with European socialist bureaucratic organisations. Nellie stocks her decaying house in London with a collection of women friends – including her husband's first wife. The house is unforgettable, with its sleeping people, and Nellie wandering at night from room to room, smoking, coughing, looking for someone to talk to. She talks incessantly, like so many of Christina Stead's characters, in a superbly created idiom whose vocabulary, rhythms, pretensions and affectations indicate tellingly her nature. The richness of her language is revealed to be part of her falsity and dishonesty. Her socialism, her generosity, her conviviality are inseparable from her destructiveness. Jealous of her brother Tom's relationships with other women, she tries to sabotage them. She brings his first wife to the house when his dying mistress is there; when Tom wants to marry a girl she has 'saved' from stultifying bourgeois

life, Nellie talks to her all one night. ‘She asked in an intense low tone, controlling her excitement, “Will you die for me, Caroline? Because you understand death through me? It would be a great triumph. It would set me on my path. Your life would go along with me in me.”’

Four other people besides Caroline die in this strange, haunting book. The peculiar power that Nellie exercises, the motives for it, the spell Tom casts over women too – these are never explained; yet they are fully established. And the background of Tom and Nellie – the Tyneside world they come from, and the members of the family still living in it – is fully established in a realistic way. The poverty, the bareness of the life there is contrasted with the socialist aspirations of George, Nellie’s husband. But it seems that Nellie, for all her socialism, is essentially death-aligned, essentially destructive. She refuses to compromise her socialist beliefs, but what value have the moral stands of someone who had driven at least one person (and others before, it is hinted) to death? Ultimately it is a puzzling novel – why the socialist theme unless something is being said about socialism? But what is being said?

Repeating features and concerns from her earlier novels such as *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* and *For Love Alone*, Christina Stead’s writing here is much more controlled, more consistent, tauter. Indeed, at times it seems as if chapters present in an earlier longer draft have been excised – the references to the sinister Jago circle of Nellie’s and Tom’s youth are mysteriously brief – but this gives the writing an urgent spareness. Yet because of the continual talking, and the comparative unimportance of any external action, the book flags a little, as so often with Christina Stead, about two-thirds through. It may be the reader’s fault, so used to plot; with Christina Stead, plot is there only in so far as it helps with the establishment of character, and the creation of the total image of the novel. And it is as an image – or group of images – that *Cotters’ England* is remembered: the struggle between the weird brother and sister for other women, and for each other, in the strange meeting ground of socialism, Bohemianism, anarchy and poverty. ‘It’s a house of terror and storm’ Nellie says of the Cotters’ house in the north; it applies as readily to hers in London, to the whole Romantic world of *Cotters’ England*.

*London Magazine*, November 1967.

## Christina Stead, *The Puzzleheaded Girl*

There are puzzleheaded girls in each of the four novellas in Christina Stead's *The Puzzleheaded Girl* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1968). The one in the title story might serve as a type for the other three, variations (one off-stage) on her. 'She's the ragged, wayward heart of a woman that doesn't want to be caught and hasn't been caught.' She is a girl who wraith-like slips through life, forming weird attachments with kindly men or their less enthusiastic wives, attachments containing some inexplicit, unspecifiable sexual component. It is impossible to summarise the story, as it is organised neither round action – none of the actions has that neat expressive Jamesian form, but instead a succession of seemingly inconsequential events – nor round characters: we are given only brief, slanting approaches. Nor is Stead establishing in any naturalistic way a milieu: the first story moves in and out of the Village, but only glancingly. Others have scenes in Paris or New York – but though the characters mix apparently in Bohemian circles, these groups are never established. It seems sometimes as if Stead is writing a variation on or descant to material a more mundane writer would have treated naturalistically: though we could never reconstruct these ur-novellas. It is a manner that leads to a remarkable concision, an elliptical compression and elision of scene. The resulting solidity and fullness achieve – with the brilliance of her language – a wonderful richness.

It is in speech primarily that her language is so remarkable. Though the description of the fecund, heavy-aired, insect and vegetation laden setting of the haunted house in 'The Right-angled Creek' shows her talent employed descriptively again as in those marvellous grotesques of Sydney in *For Love Alone*. She catches, though, most remarkably, the way people talk – and the way, talking, they reveal themselves, their sexual and political involvements and obsessions (though they themselves would never recognise them as obsessions). George in 'Girl From the Beach' bubbles over with the problems of his job (as crime reporter specialising in attacks on girls), his girls, his wives (three in this country), his continuing fight with his last wife over a collection of police photographs. Sinister is not the word so much as bizarre, weird, mysterious. It is the combination of material – McCarthy

era America, Bohemian Paris, a girl from a Communist community, a sixty-year-old man's continual desire for young girls, waiflike, teasing, possibly frigid, often father-fixated girls: all expressed in talk, talk, talk, dialogue and monologue and mainly the latter. What *in toto* is expressed cannot be extracted in 'themes'; certain situations recur – middle-aged men led along and rejected by young girls who combine a sort of promiscuity (for others) and frigidity, and who often fall prey to lesbians; marauding groups of Bohemians in drunken search of 'friends' to destroy; and an aura of psychotic collapse. But the grotesquery is all handled with an ebullient wit.

Because she is so unusual, because she is so totally original, it is hard to review Christina Stead. Her work can be summed up in no convenient pre-existent categories, forms, syndromes. The materials, their combination, the flowing bold colours of the writing, are unique. She is a brilliant original whose vision of the world is unlike that of any other writer I've encountered.<sup>1</sup>

*London Magazine*, June 1968.

## Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story*

Christina Stead's, *Ocean of Story: The Uncollected Stories* (Viking, London, 1985) is a posthumous collection of thirty-six pieces, mainly stories, but including some memoirs. It is an extraordinarily rich collection; the sheer creative energy and the love of the variety of humanity surge through the volume. These are stories that are firmly based on character, on experience, on observation. There is no shortage of ideas; her characters inhabit a modern political world. Here is the triumph of the realist tradition and the committed imagination. Set in Australia, America and Europe, and peopled by those characteristically vocal talkers of Stead's fiction, the stories collected here offer some of the most exciting and enduring fiction in modern Australian writing.

*The Good Reading Guide*, ed. Helen Daniel, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1989.

## Christina Stead, *I'm Dying Laughing*

Christina Stead's posthumously published *I'm Dying Laughing* (Virago, London, 1986) is both a political novel, along the lines of *House of All Nations*, and a tragedy of the literary life in the tradition of Balzac's *Illusions perdues*. Remorselessly it chronicles the destruction of Emily Howard, successful Hollywood screenwriter, and her husband Stephen. Members of the Communist Party of America, they are subject to simultaneous attack from the party for lack of discipline, and to harassment and blacklisting from the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Leaving the USA for Paris, they find themselves in an even more insalubrious environment of former Nazi collaborators, desperate dinner parties, smuggling scams and drug dependency. The destruction is as much inwardly as outwardly generated, as Emily and Stephen succumb to compromises, material greed, failure of commitment and loss of self-esteem. It is an enthralling, engrossing, overwhelming novel with all the characteristic Stead ingredients of compulsive monologues, obsessive relationships, and family politics meticulously observed in a deftly evoked social environment. The ultimate lack of any positive heroine or hero, the relentlessly bleak vision, may explain why Christina Stead never published the novel. And yet it is one of her greatest achievements, as chillingly relevant for the 1990s as for the 1950s in which it was substantially written.

*Australian Book Review* Top Shelf Supplement, 1991.

# The Modern Australian Short Story

‘What is unique about the short story is that we all can tell one, live one, write one down,’ Christina Stead wrote.<sup>1</sup> The story is that most accessible of literary forms. Everyone has a story. It has never been an exclusive or elitist form. The great short-story writers have also been novelists, poets, dramatists. One of the appeals of the story is the way it attracts such a variety of practitioners. This in its turn contributes to the variety of formal procedures – narrative, lyric, dialogue, fable, yarn or memoir. The story is in dialogue with novels, poets, plays, essays; it is not sealed off from other genres. It can contain the verbal concentration of a poem, the documentary transcription of the case-study, the sensuality of reverie, the awful authenticity of the confessional, the clarity of the exemplary, the exhilaration of the inspirational.

By the 1950s, modernism as a literary mode was firmly established. But the realist tradition that it had confronted showed no signs of surrendering the field. Realism was not superseded by modernism; rather, modernism and realism have coexisted in literary practice throughout the century. Moreover, they do not exist as distinct, exclusive positions: writers have regularly combined both modernist and realist aspects in their work, and at different times explored both tendencies. Both modes persisted, constantly undergoing renewal and development.

The realist tradition was sustained in Australia notably by Judah Waten, Alan Marshall and John Morrison. Judah Waten’s ‘Mother’ is a classic of socialist realism recording the dignity and endurance of the working people, commemorating the sufferings of the oppressed, yet not surrendering to despair at the oppression but instead generating a strong, positive note of hope.<sup>2</sup> It has been widely translated and commented upon; and we might remark that this classic realist story was in the vanguard of those concerns that only began to find widespread expression in Australian culture some twenty years after its publication. That characteristic focus of the 1980s on women, on ethnicity, on multiculturalism was a rediscovery of those issues that Waten had identified.

Those intervening years, however, had seen a strong movement against the

traditional realist story. It was in reaction to just such 'exaltation of the "average"'<sup>3</sup> that Patrick White began his modernist project, directing his energy and inventiveness to a celebration of the marginal and outsider figure, shifting from the humanly representative to the flamboyantly exotic or grotesque or excessive, doubting the very possibility of human social co-operation. And modernism offered the excitement of formal experimentation, the thrill of making it new, the freedom from the constraint of the 'real' allowing easy glides into surrealism, fantasy and free-floating fictionality. The pleasure of language, the very nature of expression, was foregrounded.

The realists had aimed for a transparency of language, a laconic minimalism nonetheless taut with irony and repressed emotion. This had been the way of Henry Lawson. But without this play of tone, without the tension between irony and compassion, realism could become very flat. Then the aesthetic was of the no-nonsense, no illusions, workaday prose variety. When the material carried its own force, when the stories were concerned with issues of socialism, cooperation, feminism, unionism, discrimination, the very lack of verbal and technical complexity was an aesthetic mark of the work's integrity and seriousness. These realist stories were produced within the context of other writing; the plain style gained a powerful force in standing out against the self-questioning ironies or pyrotechnical verbal displays. Equally, the dandyism of Hal Porter's writing drew the shock of its impact in part from its scandalous confrontation of the stern rigorousness of the plain style. Realism was under assault from two directions simultaneously. There were those who were unenthusiastic about its traditional association with radical politics in Australia. For them the Lawson tradition, the democratic tradition, the socialist tradition was something due for replacement. At the same time there were those who found realism no longer radical and no longer 'real'; its modes had become familiar and unchallenging. Already the radical socialism had been diluted into a bland nationalism. Now its over-familiar situations offered unchallenging stereotypes rather than the exciting revelation of the new in the familiar. The old opposition between the city and the bush was always there with its constant question: why, in a predominantly urban society, is the characteristic story set in the bush? Lawson had written stories of the city, but it was his outback settings that were remembered. And as Lawson's work was gradually shorn of its political significance and represented as nationalistic iconography, so the stories ostensibly in his tradition became increasingly



remote from contemporary social issues. One reaction against the challenge and demands and constraints of realism was to turn to other narrative forms. The tall story, the bush yarn, the narrative of extraordinary excess was renovated by Dal Stivens. Drawing on the outback tall story, Stivens's yarns are told with a marvellous economy and a beautiful elaboration of image. In 'The Man Who Bowled Victor Trumper' the bleakness of the post-industrial setting is illuminated by the hyperbole of the brilliantly inventive verbal expression that glows into a beauty of its own.<sup>4</sup> In a related area, Frank Hardy went on to develop the pub yarns.<sup>5</sup> Stivens is one of a number of writers who have resurrected and restored the fable in another attempt to make it new. Peter Carey took the political fable and by subtly retaining its political aura while de-emphasising its message, evolved a postmodernist formula of striking, smooth surface and evasive substance.<sup>6</sup> Grant Caldwell offered a dark, disturbing post-Kafkaan exploration of defamiliarisation.<sup>7</sup> The balancing act is a part of the short-story tradition: how much can I get away with? It is there in the prolific excess of invention and language in Hardy's and Stivens's tall stories. It is there in the prolifigacy of language that was the especial characteristic of Hal Porter, whose firmly psychological and individualist character-based narratives soar with a richness, an energy, a flamboyant exploitation of verbal possibility.<sup>8</sup> And it is there in Frank Moorhouse's 'White Knight', where the excess is not of language but of concept. Ideas return with an excess of unacceptability here, the extraordinary speculations so long elided from and marginalised in Australian fiction flood back in, disrupting and destabilising the narrator and the narration.<sup>9</sup> The force of this remains enigmatic. Modernism had privileged fabulation, fabrication, which some writers were to equate with lies. But an aesthetic that privileges the fiction, the lie, is open to subversion when the truth is presented as lie, and its reality lies ready there for recognition or repression. This is the game that Moorhouse is playing, while at the same time remaining firmly realist in his attempt to record contemporary social groupings, in particular the city with its Bohemian subcultures.

There have always been those writers who persisted in the realist project of recording the representative; and in their focus on the very ordinariness of contemporary urban and suburban life reveal the extraordinary tyrannies within it. Elizabeth Harrower's 'The Beautiful Climate' is a powerful example.<sup>10</sup> And it was just such a realist tradition that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by a number of women writers – such as Jean Bedford and Olga Masters – who were

building on the consciousness changes of the women's movement.<sup>11</sup> There is no need to see realism as limiting. What are Charmian Clift's 'Three Old Men of Lerici' but an incarnation of the Pan pipers, the spirit of music, myth revealed in the careful recording of reality?<sup>12</sup> To 'invent' etymologically means to come across, to discover – to see the pattern in life. Alan Marshall's 'Trees Can Speak' offers a firmly realist mode from which the spare clarity of a fable emerges and the man of few words takes his place amidst the Wordsworthian and Beckettian varieties of the archetype.<sup>13</sup>

The confrontation of realism and modernism was not a simple political confrontation. Conservative, socialist and communist shared a commitment to realism. The modernist could be both artistic revolutionary and fascist. The attraction of modernism was the attraction of the new, the excitement of shock and change and disruption with all the attendant ambiguities; and ambiguity itself was a notable component. This impulse was not only an aesthetic impulse. The appeals of formal innovations to express new social perceptions were obvious. So writers with a realist commitment to representing society plundered modernism of its breakthroughs. The disruptions and fragmentations of modernism were explored for new ways of conveying the narrative impulse just as readily as to thwart it, while the explorers of modernism could produce haunting artefacts that were not without their suggestive commentary on contemporary social reality: Patrick White's 'Clay' for example.<sup>14</sup> The purely self-referential story, such as David Brooks's 'The Line', is comparatively rare.<sup>15</sup>

The modern movement in the visual arts involved in one of its aspects not only the abandonment of nineteenth-century narrative painting but the abandonment of the human figure altogether and the development of abstraction. Comparable developments occurred in prose fiction. Murray Bail's 'Zoellner's Definition' is fiction de-narrativised, abstracted, anatomised.<sup>16</sup> Kris Hemensley's 'Self Portrait' is a conceptual portrait, not a representational one.<sup>17</sup> Ania Walwicz offers further experiment.<sup>18</sup> As narrative is de-emphasised in modernist and postmodernist fiction, writers turn to the anatomy, the list, the series of discrete static items of Helen Garner's 'The Life of Art'.<sup>19</sup> Yet here, for all the structural foregrounding of the non-narrative, a narrative is all the more strongly implied. Amidst the postmodern suspicion of narrative, the storyteller still contrives to tell a story, even when purporting not to. It is yet another way of making it new.

Modernism and realism have been powerful alternatives and their coexistence allowed the generation of a dialectic of debate and development. In practice many writers drew on features of both traditions. Christina Stead's commitment to the 'drama of the person', to fiction firmly based on human character, rather than to formalist or abstract aesthetic principles, marks her as firmly realist. But in the extraordinary life of her writing, in her assured disregard of conventional narrative lines or plot structures, in her commitment to spontaneity, she is one of the moderns.

There is no need to write of the Australian native genius for the short story, what song the shearers sang. The particular strength of the modern Australian story, indeed, may be ascribed not to any native vigour in the form but to the problems for the novelist. Australia's publishing industry, predominantly foreign-owned, only intermittently showed much enthusiasm for Australian fiction. Where novels could not find an outlet for publication, individual stories could. The variety and virtuosity of the Australian story owes something to the necessary strategies of survival and of targeting accepting hosts.

The market for the story in the periodical press had closed almost totally by the 1950s. Literary quarterlies associated with universities provided an institutionalised home for the story through the cold war years: 'reservations', 'menageries', Moorhouse variously described them. When the quarterlies had become too restrictive for the new developments in writing, further strategies were evolved. Little magazines proliferated, offering one possibility. For a number of years *Tabloid Story* appeared as a short-story insert to other established publications.<sup>20</sup> For a while the weekly reviews offered a home, but they too followed the general interest magazines into oblivion.

During this period there was a revival of public readings. No longer did households sit round the fire while the words of Charles Dickens were read out to them. But for a while readings, in the open air, on the shores of the harbour, in cafés, pubs, town halls and on campuses, brought a new emphasis to the spoken word which produced its own developments in fiction. Stories were brief and as readily read as poems at these readings. And the writing gained from that contact with poetry, from the encounter with poetry's concentration and distillation of the living language, of contemporary idiom. This was not only a matter of rediscovering the oral narrative or the yarn, forms that had never faded. It also involved an incorporation and exploitation of the speaking voice with all its potentialities and ambiguities.

Modern Australian stories might be expected to show something of modern Australian life. Modernism may mean formalism and self-referentiality to some of its adherents, but we also read stories to be informed about things: storytelling as telling tales. Of course the reality of these tales is always open to doubt; in the claims for the most authentic of realist narratives lies the possibility that it is all made up, just a story. Yet just a story can tell us much about the storyteller and the world that receives, or rejects, that story. Why would you want to make up stories like that if they are not true? What truths can we deduce from the creation of such fictions?

The modern Australian story is not without politics, though their expression is often oblique. The confidence of Christina Stead and Judith Waterson in dealing with the social and political arises from their sure sense that these are the appropriate and proper materials of fiction. A lot of creative and critical effort consequently went into trying to persuade us that the opposite was the case, that there was no place for the political in literature, that fiction was concerned with fictionality alone. This rejection of the political was generally in bad faith, expressed by those whose own politics were deeply reactionary yet not openly expressed. But it had its momentary effectiveness, and that confident handling of the political in Stead or Waterson is something that has been lost to their successors. By the 1990s our sense of the political may have widened, with the incorporation of the issue of the women's movement, of ecological issues, and of Aboriginal rights. But there is also the sense that this extension of political issues has been at the cost of dilution.

How much of modern Australian life the modern stories represent is for the reader to assess. There are no doubt absences and repressions, and what writers of one generation chose not to write about is often as fascinating for later generations as what they did write about. The repressed and excluded provide fertile ground for new fictions. What was repressed in the past – the experiences and the expression of the Aboriginal, of the migrant, of women – is now emerging, taking its place as naturally a part of the literary record. And the story can treat these themes and issues in so many ways: with searing documentary revelation, or with gentle fantasy, with comedy or with anguish. There are serious issues but there is also sharp comedy. Glenda Adams and Kate Grenville offer witty treatments of gender-conflict situations; Sylvana Gardner offers us delicate gentle fantasy, no less comic.<sup>21</sup> In Peter Cowan's 'The Tractor' is a haunting account of the cost of development, recording the destruction of other ways of life, of the Aboriginal way and of the

people themselves.<sup>22</sup> Judith Wright's 'The Weeping Fig' records the pioneering history, rescuing fragments of memory even as she notes its slide into oblivion.<sup>23</sup> We can discern a developing concern for the environment and a parallel respect for history.

History as a record of human struggle and endurance allows us to have some touchstone for the present, allows us to preserve values and ideals that are in danger of obliteration. This is one impulse in rescuing the past from oblivion that we find in Christina Stead's 'The Azhdanov Tailors'.<sup>24</sup> In Kath Walker's 'Carpet Snake' we have the gentle reminiscence of the past, of a way of life now under threat.<sup>25</sup> And with Paddy Roe we reach into the immemorial past of traditional oral narrative.<sup>26</sup> But there is also the history of Ethel Anderson's charming *At Parramatta* stories, in which the imperial twilight world of P. G. Wodehouse is more the mood than any analytical treatment of the past.<sup>27</sup> They are gentle and comic and there is a place for them. Having stressed the seriousness of the issues then to forget the elements of comedy, of play, of pleasure in the short story would be a terrible mistake. There are pleasures in the story that the narratives of criticism, politics, philosophy and history can never give. That is why stories are read.

*Reconnoitres: Essays in Australian Literature in Honour of G. A. Wilkes*, ed. Margaret Harris and Elizabeth Webby, Sydney University Press, Sydney, in association with Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992. Reprinted in *Critical Survey*, 6, 1, 1994.

## Dal Stevens

Dal Stevens was one of the great originals of the Australian short story, a writer of rich variety and exuberance. Born at Blayney, New South Wales in December 1911, he worked briefly as a bank officer before turning to freelance journalism. His first book, *The Tramp and Other Stories*, was published by Macmillan in London in 1936, and received enthusiastic reviews from Graham Greene, Edwin Muir and H. E. Bates. It is a powerful collection of stories that continued the tradition of Henry Lawson and the *Bulletin* into the contemporary context of the depression. 'The Tramp' and 'Mr Bloody Kearns' are grim expressions of the destructive effects of economic forces on the human spirit. And from stories of man's cruelty to man, Stevens moved on to man's cruelty to animals, and to the savagery of the natural world.

But Stevens also had a richly comic talent, and it is for his comic yarns and extravagant humour that he is perhaps best loved. If the bush gave him a direct experience of the hardships of human life, it also gave him the pleasures of the tall story and the outback yarn. He drew on this tradition of comic exaggeration and combined it with an extraordinary richness and inventiveness to produce some of the most enduring masterpieces of Australian humour.

In Dal's hands these yarns reached a new brilliance, with a fine sense of humour allied to a magical feel for language and imagery. His 'The Man Who Bowled Victor Trumper', also published as 'Indians Have Special Eyesight', stands as one of the jewelled touchstones of the Australian story. The realist, post-industrial wasteland becomes the setting for a visionary explosion of language and image. It is a fine example of the tall story, of the exploitation of excess, of which Stevens was a marvellous exponent. For over forty years he continued to pour out a marvellous stream of realistic observation, tall stories, comic satires, fables, fantasies and visions.

*The Tramp* was followed by *The Courtship of Uncle Henry* (1946), *The Gambling Ghost and Other Tales* (1953), *Ironbark Bill* (1955), *The Scholarly Mouse and Other Tales* (1957), *The Unicorn and Other Tales* (1976) and *The Demon Bowler and Other Cricket Stories* (1979). His *Selected Stories: 1936–1968*, introduced by Harry Heseltine, appeared in 1969.

Dal Stivens was also a novelist. *Jimmy Brockett* (1951) deals with the life of 'a notable Australian', a ruthless businessman with political influence who made his fortune in boxing, newspapers and racing. Laurie Clancy's *Reader's Guide to Australian Fiction* calls it 'arguably the best Australian political novel ever written.' It was followed by *The Wide Arch* (1958), a murder story with a psychological dimension, and *Three Persons Make a Tiger* (1968), a satire on contemporary life purporting to be a hitherto unknown Chinese manuscript. *A Horse of Air* (1970) was his most complex work, the story of a wealthy amateur ornithologist's recovery from a suicide attempt after an unsuccessful expedition through Central Australia to discover a rare bird, the night parrot. It won the Miles Franklin award. In 1981 Stivens received the Patrick White award for his fiction, and in 1994 the Special Achievement award of the NSW Literary Awards.

From 1939 to 1942 Stivens was on the staff of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. In 1943 he joined the Army Education Service and from 1944 to 1949 he was with the Department of Information. From 1949 to 1950 he was press officer at Australia House in London. He resigned to write full time, and during the next seven years his work appeared in *Lilliput*, *John O'London's*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Observer* and was broadcast on the BBC. He had joined the Society of Authors in Britain having 'encountered (naturally) some problems with publishers and editors.' When he returned to Australia in 1957, he recalled, he was 'soon appalled by the feudal state of the writing business here.' He realised 'that we needed an energetic writers' business organisation, and I said as much on occasions.' Together with Walter Stone he began shaping the outlines of such a body, and in 1963 the Australian Society of Authors was launched. About 100 people attended the first meeting. At the time of his death the society numbered some 2,800 members, had its own office and paid staff. He was President of the society in 1963, Vice-President in 1964–65 when Morris West took over as president, and President again from 1967 to 1972. Dal Stivens's vision, commitment and determination in establishing an organisation that would stand up for the rights of authors against commercial predatoriness and downright carelessness is something that puts him in every Australian writer's debt.

Slightly built, a habitual smoker, Dal Stivens had huge resources of energy. In an occupation not renowned for its taciturnity, he was a prodigious conversationalist. A phone call from Dal could fill your morning. I remember visiting him with Frank

Moorhouse and Carmel Kelly when we were establishing *Tabloid Story*. He was always helpful to other writers, young or old, and he was immensely helpful to us and full of support. My memory is that when we rose thinking it was time to leave he stood himself against his door, arms outstretched, to prevent the evening from coming to an end.

He was a keen naturalist. Indeed his sharp eye and love of nature is one of the characteristics of his fictional work. His non-fictional study, *The Incredible Egg* (1974) was a product of his research and enthusiasm in this area. It was one of his great disappointments that though it appeared in the USA it never found an Australian publisher. But Dal, like so many other significant writers, found many disappointments with publishers. 'It's always difficult,' he told me, 'if you keep on developing and doing something different.' And Dal continually developed and did something different, even taking up painting in his later years. In the late 1970s, in one of the recurrent declines in the publishing industry, he found himself abandoned by his earlier publishers, and turned to the fledgling alternative presses of Wild and Woolley for *The Unicorn* and Outback for *The Demon Bowler*. It is a mark of the degraded and discreditable state of Australian publishing today that of all his magnificent works, only *The Unicorn* is still in print. He died at Lindfield, Sydney, 15 June 1997.

*The Australian*, 20 June 1997.



## Dal Stivens, *Well Anyway*

Dal Stivens was an extraordinarily versatile writer. His first published book, *The Tramp and Other Stories*, was a collection of short stories set in the depression years, and he went on to develop the spare, laconic style of these realist stories as the medium for more playful themes, and over the years produced a host of delightful and imaginative yarns, tall stories and fantasies, as well as a succession of novels. But *Well Anyway*, his first completed novel, written in the mid to late 1930s, remained unknown until published by Arcadia, Melbourne, in 2012.

It is an accomplished and powerful work, in no way to be categorised as juvenilia. Set in an Australian country town, it vividly captures the depression years. Unemployment, poverty, homelessness are all part of the context and background, but there is no preaching or propagandising, no intrusive agenda. There is no narrative voice. Instead Stivens adopted the technique used by William Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*. Each character is presented through his or her own point of view, sometimes in observation, sometimes in reflection, sometimes in stream of consciousness. The novel progresses through these blocks of different voices, each prefaced with an identifying name – Tom, Clara, Jack, Jem, Alice.

Tom is a small-time professional boxer, now past his prime. Clara is the woman he lives with. Tom has a son, Jack, on the edge of adulthood, and Clara has a younger son, Jem. A new woman, Alice, comes to town, working as a barmaid. Both Tom and his son Jack have designs on her, while Jack is also lusting after Clara. The atmosphere is explosive. The narrative impetus derives from the sexual manoeuvrings, and from two boxing matches, one of which is presented, and one which is yet to come.

The tedium of small-town life, the brooding sexual tension, the brutality of the world of boxing and the desperation and violence of male-female relationships are the themes, underpinned by the determining poverty and lack of opportunity of the depression years. It is a short novel – under a hundred pages in this edition. Stivens was a master of concision, and already in this first novel an expert in pacing narrative.

Harry Heseltine provides a valuable introduction, discussing the earlier variant drafts of the novel and situating the work in the circumstances of Stivens's own life and experience of growing up in West Wyalong. He sketches in details of Stivens's career, his early years as a journalist in Sydney, and his role in the establishment of the Australian Society of Authors. And he discusses Stivens's problems in getting *Well Anyway* published. Heseltine records that in 1945 the literary agent 'A. D. Peters writing from London, told Stivens that "I am very glad to hear that Reed and Harris have agreed to publish WELL ANYWAY."' Reed and Harris however could not find a printer willing to undertake the book because, Heseltine concludes, 'in some measure at least, its frankness of theme and language was offensive to Australia's inter-war literary culture.'

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## Hal Porter, *The Cats of Venice*

Read individually, Hal Porter's stories are amongst the best being written in English today. And *The Cats of Venice* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965), consists of a high proportion of such successes. Yet as a collection it is open to some preliminary objections, not to the monotony that usually afflicts volumes of short stories (there is some repetition of ideas but that is confusing rather than boring), but to a lack of detachment in some of the stories. A group of them are noticeable for an unpleasantness, a distorting cruelty. It is an unpleasantness that is not simply unappealing (after all, some readers may find it enjoyable) but artistically disruptive. 'Vulgar is the word', a piece that might almost be taken as a White pastiche, indicates this quality the most clearly. The two middle-aged women say 'eight' instead of 'ate', 'naycher' for 'nature', 'reely' for 'really' and so on; the spellings are hardly necessary phonetically. Porter seems to have used them to express his dislike for his 'vulgar' characters, not to catch any nuance of intonation. It is a contrivance that in its obtrusiveness points to other signs of the author's dislike: the sun shines on Mrs Fender's vaccination marks, cocktail onions are 'the size and colour of adenoids', 'her Adam's apple made enchanting but ominous subsidences and reappearances. Her dim moustache grew less dim.' Porter's distaste provokes his intervention into the fiction – characters become targets. And his vindictiveness about women becomes less witty than obsessive; he gets unusually over-explicit in his explanation of character and instead of leaving the image or incident to do its own work, he supplements it by explaining how it illustrates how hideous women are. 'She was a Corset Adviser in a country town emporium. Since women are the only ones who understand the coarseness and savagery of women she called herself a meat packer.'

Only a group of the stories have this unbalanced selectiveness of image and attitude, and a comparable distaste for his characters produces one of Porter's most successful stories. The café in 'Café Floria' is 'merely a good *little* café in a back street, in a snoopless street, one of those cafés to which only he or she comes. Or does not come.' It is a convenient place for adulterous assignations. Its patrons have rather more social pretensions than the women of 'Vulgar is the Word', but they are equally

unpleasant: 'Dulling! How ex-rraord-inary!' The affected accents are marks of the affected personality, and Porter mercilessly catches that with a perfectly matched affectation of style: 'She even touches – just – one ear-ring (the right) with the utmost tip of her middle finger (left).' Having established this setting and alienated us from his nameless couple, Porter then develops our sympathy for them and their situation. He complements his dislike with a pity – a pity and understanding all the more effective from their contrast with and dominance over the distaste. This makes a better story not because it is less unpleasant – it is as unpleasant as any – but because there is a greater complexity. The developing pity makes the story richer in its understanding and emotional range. The fact of betrayal produces a plangency breaking through the distancing affectation, 'the chinchilla of her voice stained with the sugarless black potion.' Out of the fierceness of the disgust comes a rich apprehension of the cruelty, of the hurt.

She bends her head, a swan lighting a cigarette, and does not read on his back the message he bears with brazen dignity into the street: I shall go on and on until the maps of your body and all the bodies I have known are put to the wall, stacked away for ever, and I alone remember their lines and outlines.

The earlier 'sugarless black potion' is perhaps a corny hemlocking of coffee: but the swan is pointedly a cliché, a traditional beauty cut out and given with a pop-art cruelty a cigarette: the Mona Lisa's moustache. The most successful stories are all based like 'Café Floria' on some variant of this theme of sexual betrayal. There are, of course, very funny pieces that are different in their concerns – 'Great-Aunt Fanny's Picnic' or 'Say to me Ronald!' Even their humour, though, is distinctively Porter's, based on some underlying outrage: the picnic in the cemetery to look for the mislaid corpse; the grateful student offering his teacher (Perrot, reappearing from 'Fiend and Friend' in *A Bachelor's Children*) his sisters. They are themes that are hardly intrinsically comic, that get their humour from the sick incident counterpointing the laughs. This same off-key effect Porter achieves in his non-comic stories. He manages it usually with the contrast of childhood nostalgia and betrayal, cruel realisation, exposure. It is in these stories, often first person, that he is at his most brilliant. 'The Followers' opens with a fine evocation of childhood in a coastal town. 'Almost weekly we re-labelled ourselves: The Three Musketeers, The Trinity, The Three-Headed Boy, The Triumvirate ...' The conventionality is deliberate; and the setting is created with a lyricism that is again slightly conventional, slightly self-

conscious: 'Summer began to end. Different shells appeared on the tidelines. The merry-go-round faltered dead; its horses turned to mere wood, to lumber, were stacked in a truck ...' The writing is careful – and carefully pulling at stock stops to provide a nostalgically comfortable setting for the three boys' game – of following people. From following people they come to following compulsively sixteen-year-old Minka and her succession of boyfriends:

Now and again, for we were as needle-eyed as duennas, we saw her in the arms of someone we disapproved of for any number of reasons: hair too long or too short, suntan too wishy-washy, sideburns too loutishly exaggerated. We watched anxiously to see, and were elated to see, that this faltering of sensibility in our goddess was momentary, a defection lasting no more than one dance, and that she returned to the arms of a young man more correctly stylish.

And then they see Minka with a half-caste, hear Minka's mother yelling abuse at her, and the story comes to its unforgettable climax of the three young boys following her to the dunes and then, 'ankle deep in the chill and hissing sand, we knew, without a word of consultation, what we had to do, for, summer gone, we had turned towards being men.' And they cry out ('acrid voices into the acrid wind') 'Abo's slut! Blackfellow's slut! Abo's slut! Blackfellow's slut!'

The boys' unawareness of their sexual involvement in Minka until this sudden hatred, and their instinctive reaction with their brutal cries, make 'The Followers' a horrifying story of growing up into a world of cruelty. 'Gretel', too, is about this sort of awakening, but the revelation is managed in a different way. Gretel is brought to stay by an aunt, but the young boy (who narrates this years later) is not allowed to see her. He hears her, though:

At some nameless hour I was awakened by a high sweet wailing that lifted and sank, lifted and sank, with such regularity that the eye in my ear saw the sound as an undulating line of incandescence. The moon! I thought. It is the moon calling out. Yet I knew it was Gretel. I heard the thump and patter of the bare feet of the two women, the sound of doors, and fervent murmurings, and of a spoon stirring liquid in a tumbler.

The control of the writing is masterly. The boy's romanticising of the immured princess, her being ministered to unseen, the magic of the moon, the haunting cry are all there with the furtiveness (suggested in 'fervent'), the moon's association with lunatics, the stirred medicine. The boy's imagination creates it all into a picture of a

sort of Paradise; he can see nothing, but sound makes its own pictures for him. The climax is again one of traumatic horror. The boy creeps into Gretel's room – and she is pictured in bold bright strokes of sunlight.

It was a girl of my age. Her dress was of yellow velvet, the immediate yellow of a sunflower. Her long, straight hair, in an era when all hair seemed clipped or cropped, curled or marcelled, was to me the miracle of the miracle. It fell like a shawl of light over her shoulders.

But the beauty is inevitably shattered by her sudden collapse into insane wailing. The image of the unattainable beauty is suddenly destroyed as soon as it is seen: but the sense of loss, the memory of the seeming perfection, always remains.

The implicit sexual awakening, desire and exploration, and destruction of its ideal, is the germ of this group of Porter's stories. The danger is in reading them as autobiographical in incident – so that collected there are half-a-dozen hideous awakenings and exposures; no one could have so many hideous arousals from innocence. That is why the stories seem better read individually when there is no temptation to reconstruct an authorial chronology. The temptation to do that is there because of interrelations between all the stories in this collection. There are repeated images, naturally enough: the idea of shattered beauty or trampled innocence comes through, for instance, in the continual 'shreds' – 'reality has no frayed ends', 'his larynx hanging in silent shreds', 'a heart like tangled hemp.' The same repetitions occur in incident. The peeping-tom game of 'The Followers' occurs in 'Princess Jasmine Flower' – though the latter is set in the 1930s and in the former people carry transistor radios. Mother in 'Gretel' is like the mother in 'Francis Silver' and 'Flag Race'. Grouped together such interrelations are confusing when other details – like dates or places – are so different. That, though, is less an objection to Porter than a warning to the reader. So that instead of irritably trying to novelise the stories into a unity, we can appreciate other variants on the betrayal theme – 'Francis Silver' for instance. The narrator of this story has a picture of a faery-world-Edwardian-heyday idealised lover, Francis Silver, whom his mother might have married. She didn't – but sometimes she would talk of him; and as an adolescent the narrator has to fulfil his promise to return to Francis Silver after her death the album of postcards he had sent her. He finds him. 'He turned over several pages. 'My dear,' he said, 'My dear, how fhcrumptious!' But he does not remember the woman to whom he had sent those cards.' 'Be reathonable, *pleathe!* More than twenty yearth! One would adore to

remember, of courthe ...’ So the envelope containing a lock of hair is never given to Mr Silver. The narrator instead burns it. ‘In its first resistance to flame it gave up its ingrained scent. It twisted, fighting the flame itself. It emitted a stench of burning hair. It writhed and writhed in an agony I could not bear to watch.’

It would be wrong to seem to imply that Porter’s stories are the product of a simple recipe of ingredients: nostalgia, sexual awakening, betrayal. The ingredients do not necessarily add up to a story that works. ‘Flag Race’, for instance, superbly illustrates Porter’s flair in evoking a lost past by the right objects in the appropriate half-light – by very specific objects, actual books, sometimes brand names. Grandfather is recalled ‘in his collection of scrimshawed whalesteeth, the worn-down designs on his silver-topped dressing-case jars, in the foxed pages of his MacFarlane’s *Japan*, in the faltering music-box tunes ...’ It lacks, though, the cohesion that Porter’s stories usually have and becomes too much an anecdote – too neat, too mechanical. It indicates in its failure that though Porter’s stories are remarkable for their language, the good ones have also a concealed structural perfection.

The language, the imagery, the range and juxtaposition of referents, though, are what we are finally conscious of in reading Porter. ‘Vulgar’s the Word’ has its sudden illumination in ‘They heard the disgusting sea ...’ – though this is followed on the next page by the needless affectation of ‘they not-saw the cobwebs.’ But in all the stories there are phrases that make things new, give an illumination to a familiar world we thought we knew. ‘Trees dripped on him as though he were a postman’; a middle-aged woman ‘stood upright and gaunt, leafless, an image of inevitable winter.’ ‘Leafless’ is the imaginative leap that Porter can so brilliantly make. In the comic stories it produces the collocations of ‘new christenings, courtships or tonsillectomies’, ‘scandals and boils on the backside’; it produces also the quietly complex associations of ‘My father seemed nothing but an amiable boarder in the mausoleum of our house. He was always losing his tobacco pouch.’ This sort of quoting, though, makes Porter seem like a dry riverbed awaiting fossickers. He isn’t. His images and phrases, successful or forced (‘my mind was as congested with false conclusions as a football train with morons’) are woven into the fabric of his stories, are fully integral, not pasted-on felicities. Whichever voice he adopts – and he has a wide range – it is one appropriate to the theme and one that is fully sustained. He gathers subjects from his childhood or from current quasi-autobiography, from Venice and sexual frustration or from London and a gaga old lady; and his manner

reaches from the staccato of 'Café Floria' to the relaxed reminiscence of 'Flag Race'. Distinctively individual, he is, however, always conventional, traditional in the sorts of story he writes; there is nothing avant-garde about him. But he is one of the greatest of the traditionalists now writing.

*Southerly*, 26, 3, 1966.



## A. B. Facey, *A Fortunate Life*

After the brief boom of the 1880s, Australia experienced the slump of the 1890s. The attempts by the unions to secure better conditions and a closed shop were crushingly defeated in the maritime and shearers' strikes of the early 1890s. A combination of blackleg labour, protected by police and armed troops, and of successful prosecutions for conspiracy against the unions, broke the newly emergent labour organisations. There was large-scale unemployment; wages dropped. The Workingman's Paradise, as Henry Kingsley had called Australia, turned into an exploitative hell. This was the time that William Lane formed the New Australia movement which settled some four hundred men, women and children in Paraguay in an attempt to establish a socialist commune. It was into this depression that A. B. Facey was born in Victoria in 1894.

Facey's father set out for the new Western Australian goldfields with the two eldest sons of a family of seven. He died of typhoid fever. The mother went to join the sons, took a job as a housekeeper and married her employer, but could not bring over the rest of the family. They were left with the grandparents and after the grandfather's death the grandmother had to go back to work as a midwife and to take in washing. When she got sick and could work no more, she sold up and made an attempt to reunite the children with their mother, but without success. Finally she took the children to an uncle who was shortly to open up a thousand acres of land in the west. Young Facey, Bert as he was known, was six years old. From then on it was a life of labour for him. He never went to school.

*A Fortunate Life* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1981; Viking, London, 1986) is that rare thing, an account of labour, of arduous physical work. Generally, those who are able to write about work as ennobling or degrading find a way to escape into an easier life. Jack London was fending for himself as a fourteen-year-old, but the experience of the hardships of that life gave him the impetus to educate himself and to escape into writing. Bert Facey worked all his life. *A Fortunate Life* is his account of it, and the title is not sardonic, not embittered. The story he tells is one of physical endurance, of exploitation, suffering, heartbreaking setbacks, yet it

is told without recrimination, with a tranquility of spirit. It is a marvellous book, all the more powerful for the equanimity with which it is expressed.

Grandma and Aunt Alice used to take all us kids, who were too young to walk the long distance to school, to hunt miles around for places where prospectors had camped. The prospectors lived on tinned foods. When the tins were emptied they were just thrown into heaps near the camps.

Aunt and Grandma gathered the tins, then we would gather bushes, scrub and sticks, spread them onto the ground, and pile the tins on top. A pile would be left for a few days until the bushes and scrub, which were mostly green, dried enough to burn. Then we would come back and set it alight. The heat from the fire would melt the solder that was in the tins, and it would fall down into the ashes and onto the ground. Then, when the fire finished burning and cooled off we used to sieve the ashes and the ground under the ashes, to get the solder that had melted into small lumps. We put these into a bag and took them home. When we had enough Aunt Alice would melt them in an iron pot. Then she would wet a small piece of level ground, make impressions in the damp soil to the size of a stick of solder, and pour the melted solder into them. When the solder cooled she used to wash it and take it into Kalgoorlie where she got five shillings a pound for it. A fairly large heap of tins would be worth about thirty shillings. All this used to help, and, as Aunt Alice said, it gave us something to do.

This grinding poverty was not unique. There were thousands trying to subsist in just such ways all over Australia. When Uncle Archie took up his land under the Government's conditional purchase scheme, conditions remained as hard. The trip to the land was made on foot, since the money spent on the purchase of a horse and cart and harness took any money that could be spent on rail fares. The cart carried the possessions. Except for the driver everyone walked: 'The trip took us nearly three weeks, but we made it. We kids went without boots on the trip – it was Grandma's idea, as we couldn't afford to buy new ones when the ones we had were worn out.' And then everything had to be done from scratch: clearing the land, building a house, fencing. The only income until the ground could be planted came from snaring possums and selling their skins at a shilling each.

On one of his trips into town, 26 miles away, Bert's Uncle met a man who wanted a small boy to stay with his mother while he was away from home. He explained to Uncle that he and his three brothers were away for long periods. He said they were contractors and did all sorts of contract work, such as clearing and fencing and horse-breaking, and often went into the bush kangaroo hunting and

catching wild horses. His mother was getting very old and was nearly blind. He said the boy wouldn't have much to do in the way of work, just be a companion for the old lady. It would mean one less mouth to feed, Grandma explained. So, aged eight, Bert was sent off to work. From daylight to dark, he was kept busy feeding the pigs and fowls, minding the sheep, milking the cows. Paid nothing but his keep, his clothes turning to rags, he was a virtual slave to a gang of horse thieves.

It is a harrowing episode, and it culminates in a hideous incident when he is flogged by one of the sons in a drunken rage with such violence that he barely survives. As soon as he is able to walk again he escapes; he sets off by night in footwear made of bags he has sewn together, and heads for his uncle's property. These episodes recall Marcus Clarke's great novel of the Australian convict system, *His Natural Life* – based in its turn on hideous documentary reality. The escape recalls Huck Finn's escape from the brutality of his father. Facey's story equals those incidents in its graphic realism, in the concision and resonance of this true tale.

One of the most powerful features of *A Fortunate Life* is its narrative suspense. The narration itself seems totally artless. The manner is so simple, so direct. It is not naive, but it is certainly free from the devices and tricks that the professional writer habitually uses. And yet it succeeds in creating suspense that makes the reader want to skip ahead to see if and how the incidents are resolved. Will Bert survive the whipping? Will he escape from the bottom of the 140-foot well that collapses? Will he survive Gallipoli? Of course we know that he will survive these fearful episodes because he must have survived in order to write the book. And yet, reading the calm, lucid, even prose, the reader becomes so involved, absolutely caught up in the immediacy of the predicament, that the dominant sensation is one of anxiety, trepidation, fear. This is the sort of power that Balzac could draw on. It is something that arises from the directness of the narrative, not from any calculated verbal ingenuity. Indeed, it is painful to read some of these episodes: the stomach contracts, the breath is held in a way that fiction can rarely achieve any more.

The unpretentious manner creates a sense of authenticity. And this is reinforced by the *Robinson Crusoe*-like episodes of clearing the virgin bush and establishing a farm. This was the activity of Facey's early years: clearing, fencing, preparing the ground. After escaping from the family of rustlers, Bert goes off to work for other impoverished settlers. Some promise to pay him yet never do; others offer kindness and generosity. It is not all hardship and horror, and the humane gentlenesses are

lovingly remembered. The daily toil of the small farmer, the snakes and enraged boars, the horrors of fire, the comic episodes, the loneliness are all unforgettably evoked. The economical manner never palls. When Bert explains to a new settler how to clear the bush, build a house and open up a farm, much of this detail is in effect recapitulation. Here eighteen-year-old Bert is summing up the 'Solid Advice' – the name of the chapter – gathered over these ten years of experience, and it is far from tedious or repetitious. The excitement of starting afresh – and Bert is the expert giving advice now – vividly communicates itself to us. This is the sort of chapter you want to file away for when that residual dream of returning to live off the land becomes a possibility.

It is a romantic story. Out of the hard toil, the betrayals of trust and the battling with all the varieties of nature, emerge episodes that are elsewhere the core of fiction, epic and romance. There is an encounter with a cattle thief, the long overland trek of the cattle drive, a stampede. These are remarkable stories that Facey tells and yet at the same time they represent the experience of many men and women. *A Fortunate Life* records these ordinary tales of heroism, decency and endurance. The huge popularity of the book in Australia is due in large part to the recognisability of the incidents and of the emotions. If few readers have experienced directly all that Facey has experienced, have had to work and fend for themselves from the age of eight, and to teach themselves to read and write, many have had parents and grandparents who have led such lives.

*A Fortunate Life* offers the materials of folk history, the recorded detail of pioneering a new life in a new land. These are confrontations that are the basis of folk myth: not the myths of kings and queens and other-worldly visitors, but the myths of labour, endurance, courage and transcendence of suffering, the great positive stories of coming through. Those death and rebirth motifs so beloved of abstracting mythographers and anthropologists are here recorded in all their material reality. Mrs Phillips suddenly engulfed in fire during burning-off, Bert pushing her under water in the soak, and nearly being knocked out for his troubles by her husband who saw only what looked like death by water, not escape from the flames. Young Bert, flogged within inches of his life, unable to speak, hearing the nurse speculate on his chances of death or survival: 'If you can hear me just close your eyes and open them again.' Or Bert lost in the bush after the cattle stampede, disoriented, living on leaves and grasses and weakening, and watching an aboriginal cut up a

kangaroo; then eating the kangaroo's liver and vomiting endlessly; then waking up surrounded by blacks who take him with them, and build a fire, and after the terrors of the imagination, finding the fire is to send smoke signals of his discovery. Or being trapped alive down the bottom of the well, an absolute nigredo, buried alive, and yet clambering up to the light again. The primal quality of these episodes imprints them on the memory.

This is the sort of mythic narrative that is so often anonymous. And in a sense this is still the case with Facey. He wrote it down at the end of his life. He lived only nine months after the book was published, and though it rapidly achieved acclaim he did not live to witness its full success. Indeed, that success is only at its beginning now, for there is no doubt that the book will live on. But the writer himself is accessible to us through the book alone: unexploitable by talk shows, interviews, television features, demands for sequels, he remains anonymous. What we know of him is strictly controlled by what he wrote. And there is no need for more than that.

Although the portrait of outback Australia is the strength of the book, Facey's story is not confined to that. He spent some time with a boxing troupe, touring country towns. If the stories of Marcus Clarke and Henry Lawson about being lost in the bush provide one set of analogies, Jack London's 'A Piece of Steak' provides another. Facey travelled up to Sydney to see the Burns-Johnson fight that Jack London covered for the American press: 'The fight itself turned out to be a complete waste of time. I was never so disgusted in all my life. It wasn't sport at all – they were both nasty and spiteful.' Facey worked for a while plate-laying on the railways, and gives a fine account of solidarity when his workmates supported him against a ganger. The issues are personal more than political. In later years Facey became a unionist, and he describes a successful tramways strike, but political activity is a minor part of the book; the accounts of the conditions of labour make their own political point without any explicit commentary. Then in 1914 he volunteered for army service and served at Gallipoli.

The slaughter of Gallipoli has particular resonances for Australian politicians: baptism of blood, the nation achieving manhood, service to the Empire. Facey presents the senseless carnage with very little comment. But there is one incident that carries the note of Australian resentment of British attitudes:

We had a distinguished visitor – a high-ranking British officer. He came along our main front-line trench with several of our Staff Officers and Commanding

Officers. He got a whiff of the smell coming from No-Man's Land and asked the Australian officers, 'Why don't you bury the bodies?' Our Commanding Officer explained that the Turks opened fire every time this was attempted and that we had lost men trying. The officer's reply to this shocked all of us who heard him. He said, 'What is a few men?' He was standing only about ten feet from me when he said this and I was disgusted to think that life seemed to mean nothing to this man. We referred to him as 'Lord Kitchener' from then on.

The full horrors of trench war are conveyed but not interpreted. The slaughter, maiming and bloodshed are described, but what it was all about is never even considered. Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die. Gallipoli is constantly being exploited in Australian cultural production. Recent years have seen books, television series, films. They presumably function as part of the softening-up of the population for another lunatic sacrifice, part of that militarisation of fashion, entertainment and culture that even in its ostensibly 'anti-war' note serves only to habituate us to and to naturalise massacre, slaughter, 'sacrifice'. And by presenting that incontrovertible British military cynicism towards Australians as expendable cannon-fodder, the episode now serves to encourage that remorseless bonding with the USA as the new, clean-handed, big-brotherly protector. There is none of this ideological manipulation in Facey, however. Badly wounded, he is shipped home. Compared with the strong youth who enlisted, he is now a broken man, carrying his war wounds through a succession of jobs as the great depression grows.

Facey had often told these stories to his children and friends in later years, before ever thinking of writing them down. As Jan Carter points out in her afterword, he partook of that marvellous tradition of natural storytelling, and she points out how often in his narrative he settles down to tell people what has happened to him, to 'have the talk of our lives'.

This experience of storytelling lies behind the success of the book. The individual episodes are beautifully paced. Nothing is ever too long drawn out. That famed Australian laconicism, given literary expression in the stories of Henry Lawson, here lives on. It is the timing of the true storyteller who knows with confidence the appeal of his material. And it is the product of storytelling that knows its audience, knows that if it carries on for too long, if it is overblown, then the listeners will vanish. These are not pub yarns: Facey was a strict teetotaler. No alcoholic maunderings here: these are the concise episodes of the brief smoke-oh, the break in the day's work, the brief evening relaxation before the early bed for the early rise. And it is

a heartening, positive book. Facey's response to the natural environment, his love of the trees and birds and animals of the bush, communicates itself movingly. His shyness is touchingly conveyed. His response to human warmth and comradeship, his portrayal of the real generosity of isolated workers opening up the bush, offer a splendid demonstration of the possibilities of human love and co-operation: 'I have lived a very good life, it has been very rich and full. I have been very fortunate and I am thrilled by it when I look back.'

*London Review of Books*, 8 May 1986.

# Australian Magazines Surviving the Nineteenth Century

One hundred and thirty years is a marvellous age for a magazine. *Annals Australasia* was one of a select few in Australia that have had such a sustained existence. It survived until December 2019, and Father Paul Stenhouse, its last editor, contributed a history of its publication in that final issue.<sup>1</sup> It was one of the very few to have lasted so long.

The longest lived of all Australian magazines, and the only one still surviving from the nineteenth century, *The Freeman's Journal*, was established in Sydney in 1850, modelled on the Dublin Catholic weekly of the same name. Henry Kendall was a frequent contributor in the 1870s. In 1932 it renamed itself the *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, in 1942 it became the *Catholic Weekly*, and it is still published.

Of the magazines begun in nineteenth-century Australia, one of the most significant was *The Australasian*. It was launched on 1 October 1864, as a weekly companion to *The Argus*, the Melbourne daily newspaper that ran from 1849 to 1957. *The Argus* originally had liberal sympathies, but after the Eureka uprising it became the conservative paper associated with the squatters' interests. The more progressive *Age* also established a weekly companion, *The Leader*. Alexander Sutherland noted in *Victoria and its Metropolis* that *The Australasian* 'made itself more distinctly a literary organ than *The Leader*, and soon attained an acknowledged position as the chief literary authority in Australia, occupying in regard to the colonies somewhat the same position as that occupied by the *Spectator* and *Athenaeum* in England.'<sup>2</sup>

Adam Lindsay Gordon, with poems and racing reports, and Father Julian Tenison Woods, with articles on the flora and geology of Australia, became regular contributors to *The Australasian*. Henry Kendall and Marcus Clarke soon joined them. Clarke's regular column, 'The Peripatetic Philosopher' established his journalistic reputation and a selection from it became his first book. His historical essays on the convict system first appeared in *The Australasian* before being collected as *Old Tales of a Young Country*, and the stories in his two collections, *Holiday Peak* and *Four Stories High*, were similarly collected from the magazine.



*The Australasian* continued publication until 1946, when it was reconstituted as *The Australasian Post*. The *Post* was a more downmarket, popular magazine, but it revived something of its literary heritage in the 1990s with the appointment as fiction editor of the novelist Carmel Bird who made a point of publishing quality short stories. It was revamped again as *Aussie Post* in 1997, but ceased publication on 2 February 2002 after a run of 138 years.

A year after *The Australasian* had been founded the Melbourne printers Clarson and Massina launched *The Australian Journal* in September 1865. In March 1869 it changed from a threepenny weekly to a shilling monthly. Then as now the postage of magazines to subscribers was a major, and often crippling, expense. *The Australian Journal* began including a selection of news items to qualify for the cheaper newspaper postage rate. It announced: 'the postage of a monthly part of the *Australian Journal* is two-pence, whilst the very same sheets, by being forwarded weekly, would be charged eight-pence postage.'

'All contributions will be treated as voluntary, and inserted or rejected according to their general suitableness,' *The Australian Journal* used to announce. Later it declared: 'Our paid staff being complete, no payment whatever will be made for any contributions sent in. Contributors will please bear this in mind.' Nonetheless, some writers were paid if the publishers felt that their contributions would attract a readership. One of these was Marcus Clarke. 25 February 1870 *The Argus* reported: 'We understand that the proprietors of the *Australian Journal* have purchased from Mr Marcus Clarke, the author of *Long Odds*, a new novel, entitled *His Natural Life*, for publication in that periodical. *His Natural Life* is a colonial story, and is intended, we believe, to illustrate the evils of the old transportation system.'

A. H. Massina recalled in the *Melbourne Herald*, 2 March 1909:

Now Clarke was going to write that story in twelve monthly sections. At first he wrote enough for two months, then enough for one month, and got down to very little. In fact we had once to put it in pica type, instead of brevier to swell out the size of that month's contribution. But on one occasion he had nothing ready and we had to go to press with an apology to our readers. Finally we had to lock him in a room to get his matter written.<sup>3</sup>

And so *His Natural Life* came into being, ultimately running for twenty-seven episodes, instead of the originally agreed upon twelve.

Clarke not only contributed to the *Journal*, he also for a while edited it. Massina

recalled the circumstances: 'On one occasion we determined to improve the *Australian Journal*. We hit upon Marcus Clarke to give the "boost" we had in mind. He ran it for a month, during which time the circulation dropped from 12,000 to 4,000. If we had run it for another month it would have been dead.' A decline of 8000 copies in a month seems in excess of anything even Clarke could have achieved. Possibly it is a mistake for a year. Or even eighteen months. By which time Clarke had surrendered the editorship. But that was all in the future. In which *The Australian Journal* continued, surviving until April 1962. It was, Ronald Campbell noted in *The First Ninety Years: The Printing House of Massina*, 'the oldest monthly publication in Australia, and one of the oldest in the world. In the British Empire, only *Chambers' Journal* and *Blackwood's* have had a longer continuous existence.'<sup>4</sup>

The Melbourne magazines *The Australasian* and *The Australian Journal* were a seedbed of Australian literature, and their existence helped establish the foundations of a lively culture. But they have been forgotten in comparison with *The Bulletin*, launched in Sydney in June 1880. It was an immediate success. It was soon selling 20,000 copies a week, 40,000 by 1883, and 82,000 three years later. *The Bulletin's* editor J. F. Archibald and its literary editor A. G. Stephens, began publishing exciting new Australian writing by Henry Lawson, A. B. Paterson, Steele Rudd, Miles Franklin, Barbara Baynton, Mary Gilmore, John Farrell, Louis Becke, Louise Mack, Ethel Turner and C. J. Dennis, together with lively cartoons from the likes of Phil May, David Low and Norman Lindsay, whose memoir, *Bohemians of the Bulletin*, helped establish its mythic reputation.<sup>5</sup> Patricia Rolfe records its history in *The Journalistic Javelin*.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, *The Bulletin's* significance was over by the end of the First World War. It survived on its reputation but never regained that initial identity, despite a number of distinguished literary editors like Douglas Stewart and Charles Higham, and the quarterly *Bulletin Literary Supplement* that Geoffrey Dutton introduced in the 1980s. The closure of the *Bulletin* on Australia Day 2008 after 128 years of publication came as no surprise. The surprise is that it had lasted for so long. As Peter Coleman, a former editor, put it, 'The old *Bulletin* died decades ago.'

There were many other magazines established in Australia in the nineteenth century, but none survived as long as the *The Australasian*, *The Australian Journal*, *The Bulletin*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Annals Australasia*. In September 1865 the printer W. H. Williams had founded the *Australian Monthly Magazine*. Marcus Clarke's first published story, 'The Mantuan Apothecary' appeared in it in March 1866. It

involved those alchemical themes that had fascinated Clarke and his school friend Gerard Manley Hopkins. In 1867 Williams sold the magazine to Clarson, Massina and Company, who changed its name to the *Colonial Monthly*, to distinguish it from their *Australian Journal* and within three months sold it again. Clarke wrote in his 'Peripatetic Philosopher' column in *The Australasian*, 22 February 1868:

It is reported that ... the *Colonial Monthly* has changed hands, and will be brought out next month in an enlarged form and under new editorship ... I wish the spirited individual who has taken the thing in hand all the success he deserves.

Clarke was the spirited individual. He was twenty-two. He ran it for eighteen months, before selling it to J. J. Shillinglaw, who kept it going until it folded in January 1870. It had a splendid array of contributors that included Adam Lindsay Gordon, Henry Kendall, George Gordon McCrae, Father Tenison Woods, Richard Hengist Horne, Henry Gyles Turner, James Smith, J. E. Neild and Thomas Carrington, but the venture proved financially disastrous. In his affidavit of January 1875, when he went into voluntary insolvency, Clarke declared:

In the year 1868 I in conjunction with some others started in Melbourne a magazine called the *Colonial Monthly*, and spent more than one thousand pounds in endeavouring to establish it; and in consequence of my partners not paying their share the whole of the expense fell upon me and I had to borrow at heavy interest to meet it. And I received no remuneration from the said publication.

In Adelaide Father Julian Tenison Woods was similarly plunged into financial disaster when *The Southern Cross*, the monthly religious magazine started in 1867, ceased publication in 1870, leaving him responsible for its debts. Daniel Deniehy had earlier established a journal of the same name in October 1859. Henry Kendall recalled that it was 'contributed to by some of the most brilliant men of letters we have ever had on this side of the equator.' It survived less than a year.

In Sydney Frank Fowler established *The Month* in July 1857. When Fowler departed for England to escape his creditors Joseph Sheridan Moore edited it until it folded in December 1858. He had previously edited *The Freeman's Journal* in 1856–57, and later helped found the *Sydney University Magazine* and *University Review*. And then there was Louisa Lawson's pioneering women's magazine, *The Dawn* (1888–1905), which Henry Lawson helped print on the press of another defunct magazine, *The Republican*.

The nearest Sydney equivalent to *The Australasian* was *The Town and Country Journal* established by Samuel Bennett in 1870 – the *Down and Gumtree Journal* John Farrell called it. A thirty-two-page weekly, it provided a regular outlet for local writers, and was well-known for its serial fiction, which included Rolf Boldrewood's early novels and Charles Dickens's *Edwin Drood*. In direct competition was *The Sydney Mail*, the weekly companion to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In Brisbane there was *The Boomerang* launched by William Lane in 1887, sold to Gresley Lukin in 1890, and closed down in 1892. In 1890 Lane became foundation editor of *The Worker*, which with trade union backing survived until 1950. Then there were the satiric magazines – the *Melbourne Punch* (1855–1925), the *Sydney Punch* (1864–88) and the *Adelaide Punch* (1878–84), and the short-lived *Humbug* and *Touchstone* (1869–70).

There was no shortage of magazines starting up in the nineteenth century – nor indeed in the twentieth century. Lurline Stuart's bibliographies *Australian Periodicals* and *Australian Periodicals with Literary Content 1821–1925* provide an invaluable guide. Few survived as long as *Annals Australasia*.

*Annals Australasia*, 130, 9–10, November–December 2019.

# The Australian New Writing of the 1960s and 1970s: A Survey

What follows combines three topics I was asked to write on for the 'New Writing' issue of *Australian Literary Studies*. There are the answers to the questionnaires on my own writing, and on *Tabloid Story* (of which I was an editor for the first 19 issues) and there is the 'general piece about the scene'. When I began to answer the questionnaire on my own writing, I found it inevitably moved out into looking at the scene generally. I couldn't explain what I had been doing without dealing with the social context, the publishing possibilities, the limitations imposed by the limitations of existing media – all those things that shape your own writing, that are the context in which you are working. When there was heavy censorship on sexual material, as there was until 1972 when first Don Chipp and later the Labor Government liberalised, this unavoidably was a major preoccupation for me, and more especially for Frank Moorhouse. You were constantly in censorship hassles – which were not enjoyable, were a nuisance, and took time from writing and just living; and you were also inevitably – and unconsciously – self-censoring your writing; there was no impetus to write work that was totally unpublishable, you were frightened off from exploring certain areas of material for fear you'd look kind of obsessive. The prevailing repressive norms of the society made you look at yourself as some kind of pervert – even though intellectually you wanted to believe nothing was perverted. You got embarrassed about what you had written. Yet you also knew that that embarrassment was a social conditioning designed to stop you exploring things that would disrupt that society. Censorship tended to fill a large part of our horizons, and those threats and fears still hover, waiting to move in again. The Festival of Light doesn't need to lobby in establishment literary and academic circles: there are a lot of people waiting for the right moment to restore the repressions.

But no less censoring, even if much less recognised, were the limitations imposed by the very nature of the formal, overground media: by the traditional literary editors for publishers and for magazines, what their taste could understand, or tolerate.

The developments in my own writing were both dependent on, and necessitated, changes in the modes of publication. Walter Benjamin says in his essay 'The Author as Producer' that Brecht

was the first to address to the intellectuals the far-reaching demand that they should not supply the production apparatus without, at the same time, within the limits of the possible, changing that apparatus in the direction of Socialism.

I've not always been that explicitly, formally political in the specific moves of my own development – though I have never *not* been socialist (it's just that the socialism often seemed not to issue in my fiction even when it could issue in my critical writing, respectably attired, of course, gowned). Ultimately, anyway, the procedure Benjamin and Brecht advocate is in fact inevitable. Any consciousness development must require a formal development – in manner of writing, 'style'; and in mode of production, manner of publishing. As I developed I wrote myself out of acceptability to many existing media; as I began editing and publishing myself, my writing changed, new possibilities opened. When you supply the production apparatus with something that requires a changed apparatus, then changed apparatus will appear – even if it takes a long time and in the end you have to produce the apparatus yourself. The move to doing it yourself is a major transformation in consciousness; and is in itself socialist – a rejection of alienated specialised capitalist modes of production (I'll write it, I'll get a 'girl' to type it, I'll send it to a publisher for an editor to look at, who will if he likes it pass it on to production who will then produce it and send the parcels down to dispatch and marketing). Becoming involved in the publication process achieves a reintegration of the separated parts of literary production, of literary life; and as such it seems to me to be a major gain, the partial achievement of a Marxist aim – though very partial, very miniature; nonetheless a living example of a transcendence of contemporary fragmentation and alienation.

Not that there aren't also appeals in alienation. A large strand of the new writing that I immensely admired is in that Jerzy Kosinski-Andy Warhol alienated world – Colin Talbot's work for instance. But that, too, has required further changes in the modes of literary production – that has required new presses, new magazines, to cater for it: its message is too extreme for the overground media, whose ultimate ideological extension it in one sense is.

I don't think it would be especially valuable to attempt an academic overview of the prose of the new writing, avoiding relating this to my own personal involvement in the area. It is your own experience and involvement in the scene that determines your vision of it. People with different involvements would give a different account; people without involvements would be unlikely to want to write about it, but if they did, they could give a different account again – but not a better or more 'objective' one. By making the personal bases of my general account explicit, then the reasons for why that account will differ from someone else's are not obscured; at least, not consciously.

As for academic objectivity, the development of the new writing in Australia coincides with the realisation of the fraud of 'academic objectivity'. 'Academic objectivity' was revealed as the ideology of conservatism, of the cold war, of the capitalist-industrial-military complex that got us into the war in Vietnam. *The Dialectics of Liberation* ed. David Cooper, *Weapons of Criticism* ed. Norman Rudich, *The Mythology of Imperialism* by Jonah Raskin, *The Politics of Literature* ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter, and *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger all demonstrate that case. This new vision of the way 'academic objectivity' was a fraud, has been a major component of the aesthetic of the new writing.

When I introduced an issue of Jon Silkin's UK magazine *Stand* devoted to the 'New Australian Writing' in 1975, I argued that something happened in Australian writing around 1968–69. Sometime then a huge gulf opened between what had been appearing before and the new writing that has appeared since. (Though all the different manners continue to co-exist, of course; and things may have been written before that had to wait for the new 1970s climate for publication.) The Vietnam war was one of the biggest stimuli; it drew Australia out of a comfortable, non-political ease into a society dramatically divided within itself. The Liberal–Country Party coalition government had committed Australia to the war to be part of international affairs, to be an American ally and to attract American capital, after the English Labour government had stopped the outflow of British capital. And Australia did become part of the international world straight away, part of an international movement of protest, riot, draft-resistance, medical aid to North Vietnam, police brutality, repression and resistance, underground newspapers, broadsheets, student power, university sit-ins and occupations, anti-war concerts and readings, sabotage, etc. Even those writers who were not and are not conscious of political issues were

caught up in the frenzy of activity, the enthusiasm, the surge of creativity.

It was an international war and the models Australia followed to oppose it were international. An access to new cultural materials ensued. And the new writing that has now established itself is an international new writing. There has always been a strand in Australian art that believes the appropriate, indeed the only, role for an Australian artist is to express Australianness; but the new wave of Australian writers is totally unconcerned about Australianness. The writers generally see themselves as simply writers; they haven't immersed themselves in the works of the 'classic' Australian writers – Clarke, Lawson, Furphy, Brennan, Henry Handel Richardson; they've probably read hardly any Patrick White. Their reading is in contemporary writing, whatever its nationality – from the USA, from Latin America, from Europe – not much from England anymore.

Though the new writers may not have consciously been concerned with expressing Australianness, though some would conceive of themselves as 'writers', as supra-nationals, the context in which they worked was Australian. Even at their most imitatively American, they demonstrated their Australianness in revealing the new domination of all areas of Australian cultural and economic life by the USA. Especially in the counterculture. Indeed, this shift in emphasis to things American from things British is another framework in which to see the emergent new writing, as a shift in the cultural centre for Australia created by the shift in the economic centre.

The war and its social consequences were decisive events, events that changed the nature of writing in Australia, that marked the emergent 'new writing'. Many of the writers discussed in this issue of *Australian Literary Studies* were writing before 1967–68. But the impact of the huge changes of that watershed period affected everyone – not only producing new writers, but polarising those writing already. The shifts in my own writing inevitably reflect some of the cultural shifts that have occurred. Having begun writing in the early 1960s I was exposed slowly and often reluctantly to the full range of change that began occurring 1967–68. And I have come to accept continual change, process, as the basis of my own aesthetic. 'What does not change / is the will to change.' (The first line of the first poem of the seminal anthology that more than any other single work changed the nature of Australian poetry: Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*, Grove Press, 1960.) Being a prose writer I got onto it somewhat later. Should've read more poetry. (I think none of



the prose writers read enough poetry; but then few of the poets read much prose. One problem in writing about a new Australian writing is that the label assumes a homogeneity between the prose writers and the poets – they are certainly closer to each other than either is to the playwrights; but they are still considerably apart.)

From my perspective my prose work keeps changing from book to book, though from outside a coherence or a consistency might be more apparent. I can see continuities, but immediately on each new work it is change I immediately confront. This isn't something *consciously* sought. It is part of what is involved in doing something else – which pretty well has to be something different, otherwise it is too boring to do. The idea of perfecting a formula and then sticking with it sounds to me like a recipe for boredom – it would remove the unknown, discovery, from a work – and without that, writing is just hard work, dull, repetitive and there are other things it would be easier to do. To me each new novel or group of stories poses different problems, and so is approached in a different way. I can't simulate the manner of a previous work once it is 'done', not even for purposes of revision like, say, replacing an episode that didn't work out in the first draft with something different. I can't usually do that replacement – hence most of my revision comes firstly in the form of wholesale cutting, and then followed by only minor adjustments and trimming of phrase. I remove repetition, and I remove what didn't work – I don't even smooth over the cuts much now; I write in such a way that cuts, juxtapositions, are a natural part of the overall piece. That was a mode that had to be evolved. You evolve the mode to suit the way you are writing. And what you can't do determines the form you adopt – and leads in your avoidance of what you can't do and cultivation of what you can do, to the creation of new, living modes. This was something Robert Duncan spelled out when he said, 'Sometimes our disabilities save us from mistakes'. He had been saying how when he began writing poetry, W. H. Auden was the dominant model; but he couldn't write like Auden, so, since he still wanted to be a poet, he developed his own modes.

I could never understand Auden either, I never got much from him. When I began writing and got over the first formlessnesses, I found Henry James was a pervasive presence; well, at Oxford in 1960–63 James was too modern for the syllabus. For me, James was the first of the moderns. Later I got embarrassed about being Jamesian and tried to shake him off – even though from the beginning the Jamesian bits in *Aspects of the Dying Process* or *Living Together* had a somewhat, as

it were, parodic quality – they just seemed fun to do, no value attached to them – I just liked James. And he was an obsessive, his writing was a mode of expressing obsessions. When Robert Duncan called James the first of the moderns I felt much relieved; I could bring dear old HJ out from the closet again, I could admit that *The Short Story Embassy* which commentators linked with Brautigan (and fair enough), took its first paragraph direct from *The Turn of the Screw*. And I couldn't ever understand before, until that minute and that talk, how he *could* help a body write a piece of new writing. Not knowing helps as long as you follow your intuitions.

But leaving HJ, it has been pointed out how I'm writing in shorter sentences. There is a conscious literary choice in that but why I should want to make it can be explained only in terms of pervasive cultural changes interacting with some sort of personal acceptance of change. Who wants to write long sentences all the time? So I began moving away from the English (UK) context I began writing in. The will to change, the dynamic of the dialectic; first of all, long literary structures; then their negation, short sentences; then the negation of the negation, long, open structures – both long and simple. And later, who knows – but inevitably a continuation of the dialectical process.

So that would be what I see as being the individual qualities of my prose work in one aspect; but that very 'individual' quality is contextually (socially, sub-culturally) shaped. 'And what is my approach to fiction?'<sup>1</sup> I used to plan everything out – narrative skeleton, who went where when; plus odd phrases to incorporate; bits of dialogue. But I decided this was straitjacketing me. So after *Living Together*, and then throwing away the novel I wrote 20,000 words of after that, I decided to plan less and less, make fewer and fewer notes. The move towards spontaneity has been a gradual one through the last four years. With the work I'm doing now (*The Super Teranians: or The Name of this book is island* – finally published as *Pacific Highway*) I had a setting (a geographical place – maybe after Joanne Kyger had said I should get a map and work out where I was in relation to things; that was in California; I didn't get the map there or here, but I had the firm geographical setting, bits from many worlds relocated into and supplementing Terania); and I had some themes I wanted to work out (in life and in fiction); and some characters. I made some preliminary notes for three weeks. But writing it, basically I just switched on the electric typewriter and with the friendly help of the stereo etc. to keep out the barking of the dogs, wrote. This isn't quite the same as Kerouac, whose work I like a

lot, who represents a lot of contradictory and puzzling things for me; for a large part his 'spontaneous writing' was writing about what had happened – so the spontaneity was in his expression, not in his events, materials, characters. For *Pacific Highway* I was writing what hasn't happened, with some fictional characters I had created from nothing and with some people around me I projected into an unexperienced future. It was written in a series of raves; at first doing 1000 words a day – a figure I'd set myself in previous books to make sure the thing got done – was kept at; but I ultimately abandoned the restrictive aspect of that one-time helpful rule, and at the end of the book wiped myself out and wrote 11,000 words in a five-hour sitting. Even within one work the approach changed. And that is a change I want to incorporate – these different lengths of daily rave create a rhythmic variation within the work. Once I wanted evenness, now I don't. Balance is boring, harmony is compromise. *Panta rei*, as the Indonesian novelists put it.

I began writing novels aged about eighteen but they never got published. Partly I didn't know enough for a novel, not enough in life experience. The short stories I wrote at the same time were more successful, slowly they got published – though usually with a three year or more delay between writing and publication. Around the mid-1960s I began writing long stories, novellas – 15,000 word pieces – but the overground publishing world has never been happy with material of that length (too long for a magazine, too short for a book). The arbitrariness of commercial publishing in its attitude to length began to make itself known to me. And they don't seem to change their attitudes. Robert Roseman of Collins looked at, *The Short Story Embassy* (128 pp.) and said, 'When are you going to write a full-length novel?' Those sorts of things plus censorship (*Aspects of the Dying Process* had two stories removed from it, after Vice-Chancellor Zelman Cowen leaned on University of Queensland Press who leaned on me – and I removed the stories altogether rather than cut bits out of them) made things hard. I wasted a lot of time deludedly sending material to existing media: *Meanjin* asked (and still does ask) for stories – and has rejected some fifteen of them and never published any. When I first submitted a batch of stories to *Southerly* in the mid-1960s they all came back for not being Australian in setting; though later *Southerly* became, along with *Westerly*, the most consistent publisher of my work through the late 1960s and early 70s.

I wish I had realised earlier that the thing to do was to set up your own media, your own apparatus of publication. It took me time to realise it. I was still mystified

about publication. It seemed to involve endorsement, ‘acceptance’ (the term used) into a club or elite; it seemed to need someone else’s approval. Whereas in fact it’s merely a matter of technology – how to get something from typescript into multiple copies that are circulated. In 1973 I heard Ted Berrigan describe how, having decided to be a poet, and needing the recognition to be accepted as a visiting writer etc. by universities, he established his own magazine and mailed it to people whose work he liked, who might like his work, who edited other magazines – and so integrated himself into a publishing circuit.

It is because people here similarly did that – set up their own magazines and eventually presses, that a new writing developed in Australia. Nigel Roberts, Terry Gilmore and John Goodall established the stenciled *Free Poetry* that proved so seminal in Sydney (and through Australia) in the late 1960s. Robert Adamson took over *New Poetry* and set up Prism Books. Kris Hemensley set up *Earth Ship* and *The Ear in a Wheatfield*, Walter Billeter set up *Etymospheres*, Robert Kenny set up *Rigmarole of the Hours*, Philip Roberts set up Island Press. I remember when Phil first started Island Press, Moorhouse remarked on this being a self-publishing equivalent of a vanity press; he saw it as a defeat by Phil. That is how mystified things were. But a couple of years later, Moorhouse, Carmel Kelly and I set up *Tabloid Story* (Brian Kiernan and Colin Talbot later joined us as editors): we knew there was a lot of good prose around that wasn’t surfacing into the quarterlies or the overground publishing houses; we knew once we got *Tabloid Story* going, it would attract a lot more new prose we didn’t even know about – people we had never heard of or encountered; this is what happened. We did the first two issues with a limited range of materials – ourselves, writers we knew in Balmain, writers Frank had come across in editing *Coast to Coast*; we shaped the first two issues from the available materials – and shaped them to show the sort of new writing we wanted to encourage – no more bush tales, no more restriction to the beginning, middle and end story, no more preconceptions about a well-rounded tale. The manuscripts that then began to come in further radicalised the magazine – opened it up even more from the initial (as we thought) open conceptions we began with.

In the end it became a burden; there were too many manuscripts coming in all the time, it became a nightmare to read them. The problems of negotiating new host magazines for each issue, the problems of trying to appear reasonably regularly, became oppressive. I became interested in book publishing as a way of

producing more substantial examples of individual writers' works; from *Tabloid Story* it was clear there were lots of new writers around; book publishing would have fewer deadline hassles; books can last on bookshop shelves longer than magazines that have dates on them and seem too quickly 'out of date'. Pat Woolley and I set up Wild and Woolley in late 1973. At the same time, Colin Talbot, who had a history of alternative magazine experiments behind him, was one of a group who founded Outback Press in Melbourne. Wild and Woolley and Outback were set up because we knew there was a lot more substantial new writing around than was ever being published. The foreign-owned, commercial publishers – and the few locally owned ones actively in business – were showing almost no interest in the new writing.

There had been exceptions to this, of course. Before setting up publishing we had all tried to work through existing media. And occasionally there were mavericks in the overground scene who had done crucial work. In Sydney there had been the girlie magazines *Squire*, *Casual*, and *Chance* which Jack de Lissa, Ron Smith and later Gareth Powell had operated. These provided outlets for new writing. Gareth published Moorhouse's first book with his new, and short-lived, publishing imprint in 1969 – the first breakthrough. Of course these magazines were sexist and male-chauvinist. The women's movement attacks on them are now well known. At the time we wrote for them, male-chauvinism and sexism were not terms we had heard; the women's movement was not in existence. I didn't have any formulated intellectualised objections to the magazines since no critique of sexism and chauvinism had been developed. I was simply terribly embarrassed going to newsagents and looking to see if the latest issue had run a story of mine; what sort of people furtively look through the girlie magazines? (Embarrassed writers checking out whether their story has appeared.) To us at that time the girlie magazines provided the only outlets for work that dealt with sexuality, for works that weren't committed to the old outback tale and other formulae that the established literary quarterlies ran. The girlie magazines were open to new sorts of writing (in part, for sure, because people bought the magazines to look at the tits – pre-pubic hair days, these were: it didn't matter too much about the stories since few people read them; but the editors and publishers nonetheless did read them, did have an idea of a new writing, did have a belief in a new prose; and those editors had a wider, non-academic, non-establishment taste than the editors of the quarterlies and the respectable publishing houses). The girlie magazines were the first onslaught on bourgeois sexual repression; the women's movement critique

of sexism could only operate after sexism had at least become explicit in the society. After the taboos had been broken down, then the values embodied in sexuality could be verbalised, expressed and examined. Before the girlie magazines began, the total repression of sexuality in writing (remember the huge list of banned books in Australia) served as a form of social and political control. But the commercial, capitalist imperative of making a buck, providing new products for the market, finally won out in the struggle with the establishment's puritan authoritarianism; capitalism's contradictions allowed a liberalisation; sex surfaced because it was profitable; for a while the new writing found a medium that could carry it along. In the end, tits were not enough; pubes were imperative; gradually print was replaced by more and more pictures (in the old days pre-publication censorship operated on a percentage system; the magazine could have x tits as long as it had y clothed bathing beauties and z amount of print). But it was direct sex that sold the magazines – and in the end fiction was dropped from those magazines that survive here; the magazines themselves evolved in raunchier and raunchier forms. And the imported magazines from UK and USA, allowed in with censorship liberalisation, drove the local products out of existence; the local ones that survive now have no literary parasitic component. (The full financial story about this whole area will probably never be told – but a lot of money was involved: overground commercial magazine publishers; local printers; Asian printers; importers; and the maverick local publishers; the conflict between these various interest groups could only be resolved by the eventual 'rationalisation' of the industry; some went to the wall.)

The other maverick in the overground was Frank Thompson, who moved University of Queensland Press into publishing new, Australian writing at a time when the other commercial publishers showed no interest. It was an amazing, brave, and at the time looked like a risky, decision.<sup>2</sup> No other university press, no other publisher was willing to make that commitment to local writing. Frank's fellow publishers were critical, derisory, contemptuous of his policy. The foreign-owned local publishers were committed to believing – then as now – that there was nothing worthwhile being produced in Australia. They all existed to sell London and New York originated titles in the profitable Australian market. With paperback poetry, then paperback prose, and then titles outside of series, UQP broke new ground. Seven years later, now that other publishers have followed UQP's lead in fits and starts, now that Literature Board funding to publishers has been heavily instituted, now that new, and more

alternative, presses have been established there is inevitably a tendency to look at the conservative aspect of UQP's list. Poetry editor Roger McDonald isn't in his own work at all an 'alternative' writer, and editorially he has published more mainstream poets now, overall, than alternative ones; Thompson's own personal pronouncements and preferences have been occasionally less than loving to the alternative; he has identified himself with the ABPA (Australian Book Publishers' Association – known more readily now as the American and British Publishers' Association from the nature of the ultimate ownership of the majority of its membership). But nonetheless Thompson has done more than any other overground publisher in Australia for Australian writing, both mainstream and alternative.

'A specifically "Australian" tradition'? There have always been multiple traditions, though the Lawson line of the bush/outback realist story was dominant as a central, monolithic tradition for too long. People like Dal Stivens, a brilliant fabulist and experimentalist, suffered from that domination. There was also a lot of suburban prose running through the magazines and anthologies. The 'new' prose was initially often urban, inner-city – dealing with things that in the 1960s were taboo – sex, then drugs. There's now something of a move back to the country for themes and lifestyles – but it will be a different country from the Lawson vision.

The variety of the new prose needs to be stressed. There are the fabulists, and they tend also to be writers whose emphasis is on the finished fable, on the rendered artifact. Marcus Clarke experimented in these areas in the 1860s and 70s. Contemporary models, however, tend to be non-Australian – Borges, Cortazar, Casares, Calvino, Barthelme. (Stivens, Peter Carey and I have all worked in these areas.)

Then there is the literature of process, fiction interested in, self-conscious of, its own evolution, aware of its generative processes; the analogues here would be Kerouac and that beat tradition of spontaneous writing; and the Black Mountain version of that from Olson – as in Fielding Dawson's prose. (Hemensley is a practitioner in this area.)

There is a third area which has also, like the previous two, involved me. This is the confessional, revelatory mode – less defined by its manner than by its materials – sexuality, drugs, inner-city Bohemian lifestyles, despairs and ecstasies. Moorhouse and Viidikas seem to belong in part here. There are international analogues – Kerouac, Charles Bukowski, Henry Miller – though they may not have been conscious influences.

There are other modes, too; those are the three that I have personally been most involved in. Other writers who've made an impact on me and inevitably influenced me are Richard Brautigan, Jerzy Kosinski, and Leonard Cohen. And obviously the writers within the new writing in Australia are a context I've worked amongst and must inevitably have gained from or – equally importantly for any shaping – reacted against.

The 'specifically Australian' is something that is of ambiguous signification. Mere nationalism merely mystifies. Unless the nationalistic proclamations have a radical analysis behind them, then they are simple window dressing, false advertising, puppeteering. Les Murray draws republican flags – but his vision of Australia is a non-dynamic, rural nostalgic, reactionary one. (He calls himself of the centre.) In no way would I want to be associated with that sort of specifically Australian tradition. The problem for Australian writers today is that the 'Australian' proclamations have been the preserve of the conservative – conservative both politically and aesthetically. Whereas the west coast Californian and New York refugee writers are increasingly turning to the pre-European history of America – Turtle Island – as a way of discovering alternative origins for the creation of a better society, rejecting the alienated, industrial, terrifyingly wasteful technological society of contemporary USA; a comparable move in Australia would seem like Jindyworobakism. (Maybe the Jindyworobaks need reassessing, of course.) Until now the celebration of rural Australia has been the preserve of the conservative. Or of the aesthetically conservative organised left. The Communist left has tried to celebrate mateship, the union burying its dead, and the democratic demotic. But the CPA like most CP bureaucracies has been unadventurous and backward looking in its attitude to literature. 'Be like Balzac but up to date' was how Brecht described Georg Lukacs's critical prescriptions. Brecht and Italo Calvino are exceptions. The Soviet adoption of Socialist Realism in 1934 closed off avant-garde writers from the Communist Parties. CPA and socialist writing in Australia celebrated a backward-looking Australianness. 'Temper democratic, bias Australian' *Overland* (ex-CPA) used as its motto – removing Furphy's original 'offensively' from before the 'Australian'. Though *Overland* has included pieces of the new writing, its overall tone has always been the old realist aesthetic – the reduced social realist mode – reduced from socialist realism, which in itself was reduced from nineteenth-century bourgeois critical realism.



Since the circumstances of Australian society are unique to Australia, then the writing of this society must be distinct from the writing of other societies. However, that very nature of Australian society is designed to obscure the realities of the society. Australia is a former colonial society, once a market for the products of and a raw material source for Britain, now market and source for the USA; it is a strange amalgam of a western capitalist consumer society and a third world cheap raw materials source. Its publishing superstructure has not traditionally been able to express its true nature, because that very publishing industry has essentially been British controlled – and is now gradually coming under USA domination. So the work that was readily published here was not work that reflected Australian realities truly, but that the British controlled local editorial puppets cautiously allowed to appear – work that was inoffensive to the ultimate economic controllers. The tensions of such a situation, of course, continually revealed themselves in the work of those dismissed as mavericks; P. R. Stephensen, one time CP member, later caught up in the quasi-fascist Australia First movement through his realisation of the realities of British imperial exploitation of Australia; he went to gaol, his works are forgotten. Other writers chose expatriation.

But in the shift from British to USA control that began under Menzies (celebrant of the Commonwealth, but aware of shifting economic realities and much admired by Nixon) and is now concluding, new work expressing Australian realities has been able to slip through. New technologies developed by the capitalist need for ever new products, have provided the potential for liberation. First Gestetner/Roneo duplication; now comparatively cheap and easy typesetting for offset printing; these have made it possible to bypass the traditional and establishment-controlled media. No one needs to go through the overseas puppet editorialism of local branches of overseas-owned publishers any longer.

I remember the English novelist and critic David Lodge saying circa 1967, ‘I think you Australian writers do yourselves a lot of harm presenting yourselves as Australian writers’. The meaning being, if you want to make it, be British. At that stage, back in England, I didn’t think of myself as an ‘Australian writer’. It was years later, arguing with Moorhouse in a Chinese restaurant in the days when we used to eat and argue in Chinese restaurants together (circa 1972) saying something about ‘we Australian writers’ without thinking about it. Rejecting England and knowing I couldn’t go back there (the revelation finally and inescapably came with Jon Silkin’s

visit here from the UK in 1974) I hoped to transcend nationalities rather than replace one by another. I'm still uncertain about the possibilities of that. The society you work in determines your work; but it doesn't mean that you're committed to the nature of that society; I have a vision of a just society, which it would be nice if Australia became, though I don't think it will. But just because it isn't that just society, I don't feel I have to reject it.

On an ABC broadcast in 1977,<sup>3</sup> Professor Leonie Kramer said to me that holding the views on literature and the university that I hold, I shouldn't be in the university. I guess so, I thought, alas; but later I thought, no, why should I leave? – why shouldn't the university be a good place and Professor Kramer leave? – and a lot of others too, this wasn't a specifically personal confrontation. I gave her a lift back from the ABC to the university afterwards.

I used to believe writers were writers, a supra-national camaraderie. But I think now that that is probably the ideology of political control – of imperialism, of the establishment, of the multinational corporation world we live in. British, USA and USSR imperialism obviously cultivates the belief. A successful Australian writer will be accepted internationally – but to be accepted internationally when you come from a colonial or third world nation like Australia, doesn't that mean that your work must have betrayed the country you live in? How can Australia's interests be identical with those of Britain or the USA; economically Australia must be kept dependent, subordinate – a raw materials source, a market, a base for military espionage, surveillance, a target for the first nuclear warhead so that the USA mainland is spared the first strike, and negotiations can go ahead to try and stop a larger holocaust.

The international small press movement offers a grouping in opposition to the multinational corporation domination of publishing. I certainly feel more affinity with small press writers and publishers of the USA than with the mainstream or establishment writers of Australia. Of course the small press movement has its huge variety of politics and aesthetics; and a lot of the movement is very politically unaware – the USA avant-garde is much less politically sophisticated than the European; but the USA alternative press movement is much more developed than the European.

A new literary culture is emerging separate from the commercial overground. You produce the books you want to produce, and mail them to people you want

to see them. It is an international postal network, unlike anything that has ever evolved before. But it is a much smaller network than mass marketed paperbacks reach. When Kris Hemensley said he thought he had a readership of no more than 200 people for his work, he didn't want to print more, that was all he wanted to communicate with, I rejected what I thought was the negative elitism of his altitude. I still don't like it as an aim. I don't like the idea of restricting it to that. With *Tabloid Story* we had the belief that there was a big audience out there if we could only get to it. The traditional literary quarterlies couldn't penetrate it; but if we produced a story magazine as a supplement to other papers, we'd reach those other papers' different audiences. It worked. Our biggest problem was the philistinism and censorship of the papers we tried to piggyback on. *National Times* wanted an issue, but proscribed sex and four-letter words, and then hated the new fiction when they saw it. (When *Tabloid Story* under new editors finally cracked *National Times*, it was with a very safe group of by then known writers.) There is an audience and an interest. A number of 'new writers' have reached it. But the overlap of large audience with new writing is accidental, coincidental. When an alternative writer is suddenly catapulted from small press publication into mass market publication, it can be good and glorious. Richard Brautigan, initiated in Donald Allen's Four Seasons Press, became too big for a small press to handle and so rights were sold to a commercial overground press. But there are many good small press writers who remain with their readership of 300 to 3000 and never coincide with that larger response.

Numbers are no necessary criterion. For *Tabloid Story* 6 we got 150,000 readers when we put it in Qantas airways' giveaway QV. But though we got a handful of verbal responses, no-one wrote saying they liked it or even read it. Yet on mailing out 200 or so copies of a book or magazine through the small press alternative circuit, you'll get at least a ten per cent response (other books in return, nice letters, routine 'Will read it as soon as I get the time ...'). How terrible in the Soviet Union – writers have to resort to *samizdat*, self-publishing, the CIA funded liberals say. But the major writers of the USA and now Australia have been circulating their work in variants of *samizdat* for the last twenty years. And that is only the beginning.

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## Small Presses and Little Magazines in the 1970s

Small presses, little magazines. ‘Why small?’ Walter Stone, the publisher and printer of the Wentworth Press, would always ask. ‘Why little? Why begin from a posture of defeat? Why believe the people who tell you they’re the big boys are the big boys?’ Small presses, little magazines: the adjectives categorise, evaluate, surrendering the field to the control of big business, mass media.

Or is it elitism? ‘We live in a mass society but the cognoscenti, there are only a few of us, have our small presses, our little magazines.’ Yet even Virginia and Leonard Woolf didn’t call the Hogarth Press a small press. They tried to make it look like a big press, even when, especially when, it didn’t make money.

Back in the 1920s and 30s there were the private presses, the limited editions. Curiosa, the avant-garde, nicely produced so the objects themselves would appreciate in cash value for the bourgeois collector, books as investment, part of the art market. In the 1950s this democratised a notch into the small press: Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s San Francisco City Lights books is the archetype, publishing low priced paperbacks. And Ferlinghetti? He’d spent his time in Paris, studied for a doctorate at the Sorbonne. The Parisian expatriate cafe-society, avant-garde press was in the background; City Lights was an evolution in the elite minority culture; it marks the extension of the avant-garde from the very rich expatriates, G. Stein and Co., to the tertiary educated middle class.

And that is where the small press and little magazines reside now; they are the medium of the tertiary-educated middle class, and express the consciousness of that class. They offer alternative aesthetic variation, but no radical critique. Their nature is revealed if the alternative to mass-market, commercial and establishment media of the 1880s–90s is considered: a radical press with a firm working class, unionist and radical base. William Lane’s *Boomerang*, Brisbane *Worker* and *New Australia*: Henry Lawson wrote for all of them. These were radical papers, and they carried progressive writing in the 1890s. Now the literary and the radical worlds have been separated. A process of fragmentation, capitalist specialisation and alienation, divide

and rule strategy, entropy, things fall apart, the lack of a common culture; or is it an anarchic mark of self-determination, journals produced for small group interests, not attempting to impose a totalising culture? William Morris's vision of the future in *News from Nowhere*: 'Many people will write their books when they make them, or get them written; I mean books of which only a few copies are needed – poems, and such like, you know.'

The small press may be a prefiguration of a future model. But at the moment it coexists with the monopoly control of the printed word in the establishment media. And in this context the separation of the literary from the political takes on another significance. Which of the little magazines offers a radical critique of establishment literary production? There are the Marxist magazines, but they carry comparatively little literary material. They inhabit a different world from the literary magazines. One valuable result of Michael Denholm's *Small Press Publishing in Australia: the early 1970s* (Second Back Row Press, Sydney, 1979) is that for the first time there is available a comprehensive, descriptive guide to the huge range of little magazines and small presses – so that the magazine editors and contributors themselves, as well as literary, historical and media studies specialists are able to explore what exists. Once these journals and presses are known to exist, then it is possible to look for them. As Henry Mayer writes in his introduction: 'What is still needed is a much more ambitious yearly bulletin with the kind of data you will find here and with even more emphasis on the economics, circulation, distribution, readership and magazines of the minor publishers.' Now that the information Denholm has assembled is available, it will be possible to become aware of the nature and function of the little magazines. Hitherto the little literary magazines and the quarterlies have accepted the monopoly control of the print media, accepted their little place in the sun gratefully, occasionally asked for more grants, but never analysed their own situation, isolated from the other small circulation political and sociological journals. That was their role, not to analyse their situation, our situation. There they stand, the small presses, the little magazines, marks of a 'flourishing pluralistic literary culture', absolutely contained. Once it was a combative act against the dominant culture to start a magazine. Now the young writer accepts that this is the recognised way to get established, start your own magazine, your own press. Once it was a defiance, now it's like a school film project.

Michael Denholm's project began as an assignment for a diploma in librarianship,

but the material took over and Denholm was soon editing a little magazine, *The Tasmanian Review*. He began his research at the height of the heady hubris of 1975. The activities recorded are vast. As Henry Mayer remarks in his introduction, 'since the research for this book was done, the support for minority voices has further dried up'. But between 1973 and 1975 there was a huge growth in government subsidisation of 'the arts'. As Denholm notes, the energy generated during the anti-Vietnam war movement years of 1965–72 moved into new channels with Australia's withdrawal of troops and abolition of conscription. The experience gained in those years in producing alternative sources of information to the established media was put to new uses. The community movements, women's movements, gay rights movements, ecology movements and small press movements all grew out of the popular front anti-war movement.

And yet how much had been learned? The ALP victory, the government hand-outs to the bourgeois intelligentsia, were treated like the deserved rewards of a school prize day. The prefects were allowed to play teachers. There was no successful sustained co-operative activity within the small press-little magazine movement. Bourgeois individualism was the keynote. The few attempts at collaboration collapsed: the Australian Small Magazine Association (with what self-congratulatory, self-hating, self-destructive wit the acronym was devised), the Australian Independent Publishers Association. The Poets Union is in depoliticised, deradicalised disarray; Book People, a business organisation oriented to gathering together the alternative media for marketing, has collapsed. The funding produced a crisis of superabundance, a glut that choked itself: and no back-up, nothing to weather the hard times.

When the British Labour Party was elected in 1964, it had already formulated a government policy on the arts with its election publication, *Leisure for Living* (1964). In office, it soon published a White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts* (1965).<sup>1</sup> But the Australian Labor Party neither had a clearly formulated programme, nor did it produce one. Was there any intention for the Arts Council funding to succeed? Or was it all diversionary window dressing?

The great boom in small press and little magazine publishing was not a result of Australia Council funding. Both the boom and the funding were consequences of the energies of the previous years, the anti-war movement, the release of energies pent-up under twenty-three years of Liberal–Country Party coalition rule, the

bourgeois prosperity following on from the mineral boom. But the coincidence of the boom and the funding resulted in an inter-relationship. The funding was there, why not grab it; everyone grabbed it, who could resist? The new activities, the new energy became dependent on the government funding. Few people tried to set up a base independent of government grants, H. O. was one of the few writers to make the case that Ferlinghetti always made in the USA, that to depend on government or institutional handouts is to put yourself at the mercy of governments and institutions. One day the funding stops and then where are you? In 1980. The shortsighted dependence on grants, the failure to establish any secure base for future political change, resulted in the collapse of the Australian small press movement.

The funding to the small presses and the little magazines was never as large as the establishment media made out. Most of the Australia Council funding, as ever, found its way into the hands of big business, subsidising local branches of multinational operations. It subsidised historical and biographical works, commercial anthologies, mainstream uncommercial commercial fiction from mainstream commercial publishers.

The period Denholm deals with was the period in which government funding for little magazines and small presses was greater than at any period before – or since – in Australian history. Denholm properly recognises its significance in making ‘The Role and Importance of the Australia Council’ the second of fourteen sections in his introduction to the Small Presses, and ‘Government Assistance to Little Magazines’ the third of six sections in his introduction to the Little Magazines. The Australia Council determined a large part of the nature of this period, not only in what it funded but by the very act of such widespread funding; it became difficult, if not impossible, to compete economically in a heavily subsidised situation without a subsidy. So not only did the Council help those works that it subsidised through the Literature Board, but it actively hindered those denied subsidies by its very intervention in the market on such a scale. The nature of its intervention consequently needs to be examined.

Traditionally arts council type funding to publishers has been specifically for the ‘non commercial’. Works that were experimental, avant-garde, ahead of their time or just different were traditionally supported so that they could survive through their period of non-acceptance. The policy is a sound one and based on a historically informed sense of the resistance new artistic developments always encounter from

established, traditionalist editors, reviewers, bookshops, educational institutions and the reading public. It is accepted that these works are non-commercial. The aim is to get them into print and slowly into circulation; to support their authors who will continue to produce new work; to support the magazines that publish their work. Five, ten, fifteen years later a number of these writers will have found acceptance, will have become economically viable. It is a long-term policy and the results may take years to appear. It is a policy that can be seen as comparable to public spending on education: it is providing support at a crucial developmental stage of a writer's work. Or it can be seen as analogous with the research programmes of graduate schools: new techniques, new products are developed and become available for later exploitation by the commercial operative in the marketplace. No Australian publisher has the funds available for this sort of product development.

The Literature Board of the Australia Council in part followed this arts council policy and helped establish in print a whole generation of writers who had been ignored and rejected by establishment media at some critical stage in their career and whose work appeared through the little magazines and small presses: their work is now available and has received public acceptance in reviewing media, in educational syllabuses. Adamson, Tranter, Roberts (N. and P.), Moorhouse, Viidikas, Hemensley, Talbot, Shapcott, Krausmann, and so on: the list could be enlarged.

But the board confused these important, traditional arts council aims of subsidising the innovative and the avant-garde with a programme more appropriate for a Books Council and it never had adequate funding for such an intervention. Failing to analyse correctly the foreign stranglehold on publishing in Australia, the board seemed to believe that by simply lowering the price of a book, more people would buy it. The only result was that booksellers and writers got a lower return per copy. The question 'If a book has a large sales potential, why should it be subsidised?' was never faced. Increasingly the board looked for books with a 'commercial potential' to subsidise; consequently a lot of mid-range, middle-brow commercial writing that had failed to find a commercial publisher, suddenly appeared from publishers thanks to the board's subsidies.

When Canadian fiction publishing dropped to 40 titles in 1970, a Royal Commission was established to investigate the situation: it found that of 70,000 titles a year available to Canadian readers only 2,500 came from Canadian publishers – the rest from UK, USA and France. Protective legislation was introduced. When



Australian fiction publishing dropped to below half the Canadian nadir, 18 titles in 1972, publishing subsidies were happily dispensed to foreign companies as readily, if not more readily, as to Australian publishers. The option of excluding foreign-owned publishers from the subsidisation, of putting substantial amounts of support into Australian publishing so that it could withstand the foreign threat, was never seriously considered. The British domination of Australian commercial publishing had occurred before the Board was established. A commission could have established the full evils of foreign domination of a nation's publishing, but no commission was ever established. The foreign takeover of Australian owned distribution companies (Forlib and Leuteneggers by Collins, Book Wholesale by Nelson) occurred during the Board's lifetime. These once locally owned distributors thereupon ceased to handle the products of locally owned publishers. Given the size of Australia it is difficult for all but the largest of organisations effectively to distribute throughout the continent. When the Board subsidised the local small presses the subsidies helped the books into print but did nothing to get them around. As Denholm writes: 'The problems inherent in the overseas control of Australian publishing have not been confronted ... There has been no resolution of the problems of overseas representation and internal distribution within Australia for the Australian small publisher.'

In this context the Australian small presses and little magazines had a role of dual importance. They provided an alternative to the dominant commercial-value ethos, and they provided an alternative to UK and USA cultural domination. The small presses and little magazines are consequently of greater cultural and political importance in Australia than they are in the UK or USA. They have a vital role in a publishing environment dominated by the local branches of foreign companies. The once Australian publishers Jacaranda, Cheshire and Sun are foreign owned. Bennett's library suppliers, Mary Martins and Pocket Bookshop bookshops are likewise foreign owned. Angus & Robertson stripped of its real estate, bookshops, educational and map divisions and printing press, and the Rigby-Lansdowne-Ure Smith-etc. group owned by Hardie's asbestos, provide the only two significant Australian-based, capitalist, big-business alternatives to foreign owned publishers.<sup>2</sup>

The line between small press as hobby and small press as small business blurs, and is of less cultural and political significance than the separation of the Australian-owned publishers from the predominant foreign-owned media. Denholm sensibly follows a catholic, inclusive policy in his criteria for selection, with descriptive entries

of from 120 to 1,200 words on over forty presses, ranging from Alpha, Australasian Book Society and Currency to Fragment, Nimrod and Tomato, from Brindabella, South Head and Wentworth to Outback, and the Libraries Board of South Australia to Wild and Woolley.<sup>3</sup> The small presses, the little magazines, evolved to publish the material the establishment commercial publishers and magazines ignored. Evolving from the rare-book collectors' item, scarce because of its price, valuable because of its scarcity, they attempted to enter the commercial market. But only the vast resources of multinational 'economies of scale' can produce a book or magazine that retails for something you can afford: and this can only be done by a lowest common denominator approach, to reach a 'mass' market. But the mass market, the mass audience is a creation of the world of big business; there is no mass audience, there are groups of specific audiences. To produce cheap product by 'economies of scale', you have to treat your audience as if it were a mass audience.

How can the small press movement survive in the structure of the trade as it is: at least 40% of the retail cost to the bookshop, 20–25% to the distributor? The unavoidable mark-up on production costs is a factor of 5 or 6. A magazine or book that in the 1970s could be produced for \$2 had to retail for \$12. The small presses and little magazines persist in trying to work through this market structure, because there is no other. Increase your print run, print in the third world, reduce your production cost to 50 cents a unit: but no small press has the capital to finance the large print runs, no small press has access to the distribution network that would absorb the large print run. Subsidies only perpetuate the structure.

In fact most of the publications Denholm lists are not available through normal trade channels. The more established of them rely on subscription lists, others circulate amongst small coteries; and the small press books can be found in only a handful of shops. 'Their very existence is at best known to a tiny circle', as Henry Mayer puts it in his introduction. Elitism becomes the rationalisation of defeat in the market, a recognition that the market could not significantly be entered. Little magazines began to list other little magazines, review small press books. The aesthetic of self-referentialism. But it is an aesthetic that leads to a self-consciousness, and an awareness of the medium used, like Brecht's alienation effects. To know the mechanisms and conventions can be to understand them better, to demystify, to use more effectively. It was fashionable to laugh at the little magazine bibliomania; as if little magazines, small press publications were not worth recording, listing.

The sneer of control. But within the movement the activity went on regardless. From Paradise, California Len Fulton published the monthly *Small Press Review*, devoted to reviewing and listing small press publications; the *Directory of Small Magazine/Press Editors and Publishers*, the *Small Press Record of Books in Print*, and the *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. These became the trade journals of the medium, directories, no longer the rare book and esoterica bibliographies. The basic bourgeois nature of the small press: trade, commodity.

Michael Denholm's checklist is more in the antiquarian manner. It is not historical. It does not survey small presses and magazines over a period of time. It would have been nice if it had continued the survey from John Tregenza's announcement in his *Australian Little Magazines 1923–1954*, that 'in 1953 it seemed that the era of the little magazine was drawing to a close in Australia'.<sup>4</sup> But Denholm offers a spot-check, not a survey: 'The present tense in this work refers to the time of writing, 1975–76, and information is correct only to that date.' It offers no historical perspective, no historical method.

But the information is recorded, and just recording information is subversive. It alters the map, displaces the field and hierarchies. With libraries shifting to computer-based electronic data recording, with directories compiled from computer-based data banks, the centralised control of information by the monopolies has reached a new stage. The vast memory capacity of the computer is presented to dazzle us, to solicit our awe. The cost of installing computer systems takes their control absolutely away from the individual. The limited number of information channels is the real point, the limited number of communications corporations, not the vast resources of the memory bank.

But as long as data recording outside the establishment concept of what is data continues, then information is not totally controlled. The small presses and magazines list each others' products; develop directories, checklists, bibliographies. All this presented as data can gain access to other data systems. Henry Mayer, Professor of Government at the University of Sydney, chairman of the editorial board of *Media Information Australia* contributes an introduction to Denholm's compilation; *Australian Literary Studies* publishes this review of Denholm; the data crosses into the *ALS* annual bibliography, into academic discourse, into the educational machine. The channels have made contact. It is a slow process. The small presses and little magazines do not achieve the immediate acceptance that the

simultaneous exposure through print and electronic media can gain the product of big business establishment media. It seeps along slower. But it gets there. That is why the depoliticisation of the small press and little magazines is significant; it could be a channel for radical change; it isn't.

As with the publishers, Denholm's aim in listing the little magazines is catholic and inclusive. *Current Affairs Bulletin* as he notes himself, had 'a circulation of some 27,500.' Some would be better described as journals, or in the case of the *New Journalist* and *Vashti's Voice*, newspapers. They certainly, however, do not have mass appeal. There is a great deal of difference between magazines such as *Meanjin Quarterly*, *Your Friendly Fascist*, *Timestream* and *Plain Turkey*, *Refractory Girl* and *Womanspeak*, in their aims and in their importance. But each, in its own way, has a significant role to play in Australian society. Denholm describes some 140 publications in entries ranging from 80 to 1,500 words. We can only be grateful for the immense energy that has gone into this pioneering compilation.

The small presses and little magazines were only one part of an oppositional structure to establishment and monopoly media. There was also the 'alternative' press where the cultural and the socio-political did mix. Unfortunately, Denholm does not deal with this area. Yet the format of the alternative press spread into magazines that Denholm does discuss such as *Tabloid Story* and *Mejane*. And many of the contributors of the little magazines appeared in alternative media like *Bottom Line*, *Bush Telegraph*, *Digger*. It remains an unexplored area. Yet Denholm does deal with the scholarly quarterlies, the institutional productions, the professional career publications like *Australian Literary Studies*, *A.U.M.L.A.*, *Australian Quarterly*, and *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*. These are the inheritors of the nineteenth-century man-of-letters aim of encompassing all knowledge, and what isn't included isn't knowledge, now reduced from the old quarterly reviews to the specialist productions of the academy. Insofar as they are small circulation magazines setting some cultural context, they have their place in this study; and the literary journals in this line occasionally share contributors with the little literary magazines. But there is a difference between the institutionally or organisationally funded journals and the little magazines; and there is a difference between the literary magazines and the political magazines, and between the political magazines like *Arena* and *Intervention* and those that are the political organs of established parties, like *Australasian Spartacist*, *Australian Marxist Review* and *Australian Left*

*Review*. But Denholm's achievement has been to list, to compile: interpretation has been left to others. Indeed, Denholm has elsewhere offered some more interpretative treatment of the material in his article on the crisis in the funding of the arts in *The Tasmanian Review*, 1. 1 (1979), and in his account 'Small Publishing in Australia in the late 1970s: a View', in *Gargoyle*, 14 (1979).

*Australian Small Presses and Little Magazines* is published by Tom and Wendy Whitton's Second Back Row Press. The Whittons were librarians and as a library diploma project did a survey of Sydney bookshops; they published this themselves and it was immensely successful; they followed up with guides to bookshops in Melbourne, Adelaide, Tasmania etc. They gave up librarianship and concentrated on the small press they found they had established; they imported and distributed books to sustain the press's activities. Like all small presses, their publishing programme has now been cut back; their journal, *Australasian Small Press Review*, has now ceased publication. It would not now, 1980, be possible to publish Denholm's directory, since the new book bounty act requires a minimum run of 1,000 copies for eligibility for the bounty; they got it out the last year that a run of 500 copies would qualify. The capital costs, the problems of access to the market, the problems of specialist publishing, make more than 500 copies a financial impossibility. These same factors mean that it will be impossible for them to reprint the book. Consequently it now has a rarity value. It is an invaluable, indispensable and irreplaceable guide; of economic necessity it is now part of the limited-edition market, the old private press and fine press world of high prices for scarcity value, the book collectors' market rather than the working scholar's, student's or writer's library aid. The de-democratisation of knowledge that has been under accelerated process through the latter part of the 1970s is here manifest.

*Australian Literary Studies*, 9, 1980.

## **Living in the Inner City: Frank Moorhouse, *Futility and Other Animals***

There have been two distinct groups of Australian short stories, the outback tradition and the suburban. The former is probably unusable at the moment, but the latter group has become an increasingly significant category for Australian (and New Zealand) writers. Frank Moorhouse is independent of either of these groups. His concern in *Futility and Other Animals* (Gareth Powell Associates, Sydney, 1969) is with inner city living, with the lives of those existing almost totally within an urban environment. The occasional departures from this world in his material deal with suburbanites rejecting the suburbs to enter the central vortex; or with urban dwellers making brief visits back to the country town of their childhood. But neither suburbs nor country towns are examined as locales of interest in themselves, as places offering possibilities for life. In 'The Second Story of Nature' Roger says, 'It's the nine-to-five people in the suburbs who are the happy ones', and this disturbs Cindy:

'What makes you say that?' Her sentence jumped from her mouth and stood astride his statement. What he had said was something that she was frightened was true. She had met it before and had not dealt with it. It was something she had put away. (147)

Later Cindy says "Perhaps we could live in suburbia ... it'd be unneurotic." She didn't believe it.' It remains a fearful possibility that isn't explored. In 'Apples and Babies' Daniel has left Sydney's Kings Cross, sick, and returned home briefly to the family in the country. At a party of his sister's he meets a young girl and toys in his mind with the idea of opting for her world and her values – apples and babies. But the girl is intrigued by his Kings Cross Bohemia:

She wants to go wild I told Jimmy Chanter.

'Yes,' he said, 'you don't have to tell me. And you want to go quiet. Next thing she'll be growing hair long, wearing jeans, a boy's shirt, no make-up or shoes. That'll be the end of your private school virgin wife.'

‘Sometimes I think I’d be happier if I was in the paddock of conventions safely grazing.’

‘The cows that graze safely are milked or slaughtered,’ Jimmy said. (125)

And the theme of the story is again not one of testing country town values, but of showing the pull of the inner city.

It is not a geographically or architecturally specific inner city. It is a city in the sense that hell is a city, and it is the hell that Moorhouse is interested in, not the physical details of the place; the mind is its own place wherein we make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven. And the hells here are of the *Huis Clos* variety, ‘hell is other people’ – essentially human interactions in small groups of twos and threes in bare sets. There are occasional Sydney place names. But scarcely any attempt to evoke the textures or colours or compositions of the streets, terraces, tenements and hotels. Moorhouse is not attempting to establish a physically tangible world like James Baldwin’s New York or Lawrence Durrell’s Alexandria. The stories are generally brief and spend little time on physical locales. And this very unspecificness allows for the ready generalisability of the themes. They are themes of inner city living in any large city; the connections the characters would make are not with the hinterland of their own continent, but with other centres in the global village. The books occasionally mentioned demonstrate this – by Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg: they are reaching out to shared values in other worlds, not trying to consolidate any particular Australian heritage. Cindy in ‘The First Story of Nature’ having left home ‘stopped reading *Women’s Weekly* and found her way, lost and unguided, in Betty’s *New Yorkers*’.

But though the streets and pubs are not used to evoke memories and recognitions, the presented attitudes are. Lifestyles, idioms, duplicities, treacheries, self-indulgences are all re-created. This is the inner city, the downtown Bohemian vortex. It is this that by the end of the collection Moorhouse has so recognisably, so accurately established. The milieu is summarised in ‘Apples and Babies’; it is a conveniently explicit paragraph – though summarising explicitness about such a world can misrepresent, overstate what is usually hinted at, and from simple honesty produce embarrassment. The success of Moorhouse’s stories comes from their lack of such explicitness, from their assembling by hint, association, by a careful cumulative process. Explicitness like this is rare, but it provides a convenient quotable denotation of this world:

Drinking from beer bottles in grimy kitchens. Dancing to worn rock and roll records. Talking about authoritarianism and Zen and about Burroughs and Ginsberg. Sending up your friends, sending up yourself. Talking just beyond what you know. Always being tempted out just that little way further beyond your knowledge. Wading out in the beer. Always more books to read. Someone else to know about. Always another party. Always someone's affair finishing. Another affair starting. Another person gone to North Ryde Psychiatric Centre. Another lesbian. Another pill. Another idea about going interstate. Another way of making an easy quid. Another idea about going to the country and living like a primitive. (119–20)

It is within these confines that the stories move. The proletariat have moved out of the inner city (they are glimpsed briefly in 'Dead'), immigrant New Australians and Aboriginals are ignored. The figures in these pages are in general members of an essentially Bohemian scene. Though it is a wider scene that the introductory note suggests:

the environment and the characters are continuous. In some ways, the people in the stories are a tribe – a modern, urban tribe – which does not fully recognize itself as a tribe. Some of the people are central members of the tribe while others are hermits who live on the fringe.

The tribe isn't what emerges most strongly from reading these stories. There aren't, for instance, many tribal gatherings – no panoramas of the Newcastle or Vanity Fair or Forth and Clyde hotels – no overviews of the Paddington or Darlinghurst or Balmain parties. Mainly we see two or three people in personal interrelationships. There may be a tribe around them, but it isn't portrayed as such in the book. And some of the people, particularly the homosexuals, seem not to belong at all closely to the tribal scene, but to have made glancing contact with it from their other orbits. Rather than exploring a recognisable social group – though this is a tangential function of the collection – Moorhouse is concerned to explore small groups of people in a particular area of human experience: The shared environment is both internal – anxieties, pleasures and confusions – and external – the houses, streets, hotels and experiences. The anxieties, pleasures and confusions derive almost totally from the sexual life. The relationships most of the characters are shown in are sexual relationships. The impetus, the plot motivations, the narrative lines, generally derive from sexual involvements. Those stories that are not plotted on sexual themes are the weakest. The three stories about the boy leaving his suburban home and friends,



for instance ('What Can You Say?', 'Lou Shouted Hey', and 'Walking Out') lack the force of most of the others because the plot concerns and the psychological motivations have no especial sexual component; they become rather ordinary, rather conventional social satires, with nice moments, certainly, but not something various other writers mightn't have done. They lack that particular confrontation with sexual experience, with anxieties and doubts and commitments about and to sexual experience that characterise Moorhouse's successful work. On the other hand, in 'The Train Will Shortly Arrive', about the homosexual revisiting the country town of his childhood, although there is a primary sexual concern, this isn't given adequate expression in terms of plot or action. It is one of the best and most assured stories in the collection, but it lacks the force it might have had from a certain plot weakness; the strength of the character drawing, the exactness of the portrayal of the character's reactions, are not attached to an appropriate and expressive action. For this theme the appropriate plot would have been a sexual one – encounter, rejection, fulfilment or whatever: but instead, Bernie simply walks round the town, meets people, remembers things – and is back in the city. Certainly the non-plot expresses the failure to re-create any relationship with the town of his youth but there remains a sense of incompleteness, a sense of something marvellously begun, but not resolved. It is still a very striking, a very poised and memorable story but it lacks its appropriate form. Generally there isn't any discrepancy between the plots, and the themes and character. The limpness of the plotting in 'No Birds were Flying Overhead, There were no Birds to Fly' is a direct result of a limpness, an uncertainty of theme. The story doesn't get beyond being an anecdote of a girl's walking out on her work, something neither especially revealing of psychology, for her character is not established, nor representative of anything or dramatically significant. This tendency towards the episodic is especially noticeable in 'Rambling Boy' and 'Ten Years'. Though in the case of these two stories it is perhaps appropriate that irresolute plots are portraying homosexual characters. There can't be any babies.

Plotting for a Bohemian milieu is a severe problem. The usual fictional themes of job security, marital tensions, fidelities or infidelities, ambitions, competitivenesses, social responsibilities, political engagement and so on, are only partially available. In societies liberated from the social norms, the plots for depicting social normalcy are irrelevant. The choices immediately available are of liberated plotless stasis, or the revelation of the hypocrisies of pretended liberation: jealous libertarians, bums

with bank balances and so on. With most of his characters unemployed, or employed in jobs to which they have no commitment and are only temporarily engaged in, Moorhouse has to search for his plots in sexual behaviour. And what plots does sex offer, when you are writing about a permissive society in which lengthy wooing of the partner is unnecessary, in which bourgeois marriage taboos are removed? With the pill, the basis of most of the puritan guilts is removed: the residual guilts, the learnt reflexes and the haunting taboos hang around. Some of them are touched on in the 'Stories of Nature', but they are not an important theme with Moorhouse. His characters are generally free from those hang-ups; what they do tend to be caught on, though, are the illusions of romantic love, held in a context of bitter experience and unconscious betrayals. 'Across the Plains, Over the Mountains, and Down to the Sea' and 'The Story of the Knife' poignantly counterpoint the tender idyllic moments against the pervasive unromantic permissiveness, the lack of any sustained and shared conviction in the worthwhileness of the exclusive and special relationship:

Sally put her hand on his neck, her fingers under his ear.

'You don't need any symbols, my sweet,' she said, 'let's go upstairs and find a bed.' She took his hand and kissed the side of his face.

He nearly took the easy way out and went but he sensed that it would be one of those unfortunate fucks where indifference on his part would cause it to finish messy and cold in an uncomfortable shared bed. And there was Anne. (10)

In these stories and in the title story there is a fine tenderness, carefully avoiding the maudlin or self-pitying or sentimental, beautifully evoking the hopeless fragilities and vulnerabilities of sexual relationships. Then there are the studies in sexual pathology of the middle 'Sickness' section – not the best of the book. I don't think it is simply a mark of the distaste that they are intended to produce that provokes my rejection of many of these stories. The chief clerk Nish is too stock a chief clerk, and though he is portrayed with some inwardness – especially in his anarchic destruction of the records of insurance policies – he is treated with no warmth, no feeling or sympathy. Interestingly, he isn't an inner-city dweller, he is not typical of the characters of these stories. The homosexual deliriously calling for his mother when sick in 'Bread, Sugar and Milk', the woman in 'I am a Very Clean Person' obsessively cleaning the flat, hating the mess and sexual emissions of her man – these are too limitedly case-history types. There is an unfortunate stereotyping of people here, a reducing categorisation of people into predetermined theoretical

patterns of behaviour.

But if the homosexuals can't have babies – though in 'I Saw a Child for the Three of Us' Terri hopes for a child for her, and bi-sexual Bernie and camp Mervyn – babies offer the plot impetus for many of the heterosexual stories. There is fear of babies in 'Anderson, How Can There be a Baby and No Crying?' and 'The First Story of Nature', attempts at conception in 'I Saw a Child for the Three of Us' and 'The Second Story of Nature', pregnancy in 'The Third Story of Nature' and birth in 'Dry Munching'. When I say that these are the most successful of the stories, this is not at all to recommend fecundity as a proper theme for fiction or life, or in any way to seem to produce pro-life values from this collection. But in these stories the fears, hopes and emergences of babies provide the appropriate plots, the efficient correlatives for character, theme and action. And here Moorhouse is doing original and forceful work, here he is capturing the day-to-day details of cohabitation and the liberated life: fears, mistrusts, absurdities and dependencies catch accurately the way we live now.

Though it isn't the total way. The restriction of the effective concern of these stories to the sexual is in the end limiting. This exploration of a consciously restricted area of human behaviour runs the danger of monotony. And there is a restriction not only of theme but of tone, of emotional possibilities. Within the area of sexual experience, varieties are encompassed – prostitution, masturbation, long affairs, brief couplings, heterosexuality, homosexuality – but the emotional varieties are not many. The collection's title is key signature of the mood. There is none of the humour here that Moorhouse shows so assuredly in stories like 'Dirty Girl' (*Stand*, 8, 4, 1967) and 'The American Poet's Visit' (*Southerly*, 28, 4, 1968). And the social and political themes of his early stories are not represented here either. Implicitly, the collection offers a limited picture of the tribe's range of mood and occupation.

In the best of the stories of this collection, Moorhouse has moved into a whole new area of material, of experience, of sensibility for Australian fiction. Others may have made brief forays, but no one before has attempted so long a sojourn, so thorough a mapping. It's an exploration, moreover, from inside – this is what gives the stories their strength, their persuasiveness. We are assured, by the manner, by the restraint, by the authority of the telling, that this is the way things really are – these are the authentic idioms and actions, this is how the tribe expresses its values. Moorhouse isn't writing as an outsider looking in, he is not trying to titillate the reader with

relaying four-letter words and shocking doings. Those are present, certainly, but are not presented in the shock and censure manner of the bourgeois intruder. Nor are the characters and events being measured against some bourgeois Judeo-Christian moral norm. No values other than those of the tribe represented intrude: it is a world setting up its own values, its own ethic. But in its ethics and rituals it is a world firmly established for us. Perhaps to lament the lack of the geographic or topographic specific is to lament the visual while missing the way the social relationships are so carefully established. For those relationships are Moorhouse's concern: not the visual, not the decorative, not the fantastic, the grotesque or the bizarre, nor the experimental. His style has a carefully achieved clarity for moral and psychological naturalism. It has a wide range: the careful rhythms in the homosexual stories, the self-defensive bitter cocooning pedanticisms of humorless ladies, are rendered admirably. Less noticeable is the easily flowing perspicuity of the 'Stories of Nature', where the labour of the art has classically all been to conceal the art. This is not a style likely to gain recognition quickly in Australia, where the mannered rhythms of White, or the rich emotions and ornamentation of Porter and Keneally are the fashion. Not that I would want to decry White, Porter or Keneally: but the exotic is not the only style, the plain style has its appropriateness, its range, and its equally important rewards. For these stories of the sexual life, for these careful explorations of new, evolving ethics, of people feeling their way towards acceptable codes and values, finding the justifications or definitions for their way of life, this is the proper manner. The exoticisms and grotesqueries of the immoralist, the anarchist, the nihilist would be out of place in these serious examinations of sexual ethics. Behind all these stories lies the ethic of being true to oneself, breaking with delusions and deceptions: the occasional three- and four-letter words, the occasionally aberrant activities, are all in the service of this quest for the honest way, are presented to us not to shock, but to ask for a new, truer, fairer way of life. His characters would probably arraign him for it, but the impulse behind their writer is that of the moralist.

*Southerly*, 29, 3, 1969.

# **‘My Name is Rickeybockey’: The Poetry of Robert Adamson and the Spirit of Henry Kendall**

Holdsworth frequently used to pay Kendall’s fines at Water Police Court. Once, Kendall went missing – Holdsworth left cashier’s desk – went up to Central Police Court – asked if Kendall was there: ‘No, sir.’ Just then heard Kendall’s voice from a cell – ‘My name’s Rickeybockey.’

A. G. Stephens, *Bulletin* Diary, 20/5/96<sup>1</sup>

Robert Adamson’s first book, *Canticles on the Skin*, appeared in 1970.<sup>2</sup> Its impact was immediate. The first poem, ‘The Imitator’, opened:

Dirty hypodermics rattle in the glovebox: morphine flows  
over the top of your brain. An artery collapses  
and migraine floats out of your eyes – Alright, there’ll always  
be glib explanations: cashing-in on experience again?

The shock opening, the starting off at full throttle, has its revered literary tradition – Donne’s ‘Spit in my face you Jews’ – but is nonetheless effective for that. And the danger of the device, that its very traditionality should now run the risk of being the somewhat hammy, the overblown, the too blatantly posturing, is something that Adamson has taken account of and exploited. Writing a poem involves not only producing the powerful line, but countering the variable reactions to the line from the variable audiences. The proclaimed bad boy stance, with the insignia of hypodermic syringes and hard drugs, moves in the moment of its telling from a low-life realism to a surrealism with all the inexactitude of the expressively exaggerated account –

An artery collapses  
and migraine floats out of your eyes

in which the self-dramatising is seen by the poet as absurd and nonetheless destructive for that. When we move from this proem to part one of the poem, ‘The Imitator’, the dramatic rhetoric, the romance of powerful cars and drugs, is suddenly resituated. Now we are on a train, under the control of the child welfare

department. The juxtaposition says so much.

Central station slides by, I sit here stranded in a window  
Trainlights come on with a flutter,  
electric motors hum into my brain: flexing my limbs  
ready for some idiot's escape. The man beside me offers  
cheese sandwiches – I take one as he mutters  
apologetically 'It's for the best son, for the best ...'

'The Imitator' is an extraordinarily powerful poem. The themes and imagery announced here – cars, drugs, sexual ambiguity, crime and punishment – recur through the later volumes, though far less frequently than the received impression of Adamson's work might suggest. Adamson was uneasy about writing about these materials. He had no wish to perpetuate the image of a life of crime and prison. 'Cashing-in on experience again?' as he asks himself sardonically. It was something he preferred to leave behind. When he does write about it, it is with an awareness of the self-delusions involved, the young boy imitating the bad boys; and then the necessary imitations, the acts that are learned to survive in gaol.

Lightsout: I've rubbed tea into my hair and wrapped a rag  
around my head, so my hair will set in a fringe.  
By morning it'll be ready to comb – Funny, remembering how  
I couldn't wait to grow a beard; now as the bumfluff darkens under  
my chin, I hate the thought of whiskers –  
There are many advantages in being the youngest boy here.

The mirror runs through the poems of *Canticles on the Skin*: the mirror to make-up in, the imitation of reality.

Running throughout 'The Imitator' sequence is a powerful tension between the materials employed as lived experience, autobiographical, confessional; and the material employed generically – the given scenarios of prison novels, crime movies, television police procedure shows. There had been so many movies, novels, newspaper accounts of petty crime and juvenile delinquency by the time Adamson came to write 'The Imitator' that the experiences were in no way fresh or unique. They were comparatively unknown to Australian poetry but not to literary and cultural production in general. The paradox provided a problem for the poet; of the materials being both too raw and new, and at the same time too old and clichéd. They required all the available skills of the tightrope line of literary balancing. 'Make it new' was

Ezra Pound's poetic prescription. The task for Adamson was to make new for poetry materials debased and clichéd and distorted by the media archetypes. His solution was to treat the materials allusively. There is the shadow of a narrative sequence, but the details are not spelled out, the crimes and courts and cells are not replicated with a documentary realism. Instead, they are evoked from the reader's shared memories of prison movies and newspaper reports; evoked with poetic economy and the most accurate selection of appropriate image, gesture, implication.

In gaol Adamson had begun to write. He began, like all poets, imitating the available models, Shelley in particular. We recall how Henry Kendall had called his early works 'imitations', the necessary exercises on the way to discovering his own voice. As Adamson moved to more contemporary models he discovered Robert Lowell, another writer of imitations. Lowell wasn't exactly the model Adamson wanted. But Lowell had made acceptable in established literary circles the introduction of new experiences, new expressions, new language.

Every new generation of writers has to create its new language, has to take from the living, spoken word the components that can bear a literary resonance. Lowell had moved in his own verse to a much more colloquial mode than had been acceptable, creating a new poetic out of living language rather than working within an inertly inherited range of idiom, vocabulary, and acceptable material. For there are conventions of material as well as of expression which the poet has to confront. The pressures against including hypodermics, V8s and prison cells in poetry in Australia in 1968 were huge. The range of allowable material had become so narrow. In England Philip Larkin had evolved an idiom for bicycle clips and Sunday morning church, an image of the joyfully accepted narrowness of human possibility eagerly endorsed by the connoisseurs of contemporary poetry. To write about drugs, getaway cars and gaol was to risk being seen as rather crass; disrupting the poetic moment with the unnecessarily self-dramatising. This was the end of the age of what A. Alvarez had called 'the gentility principle' that had atrophied mainstream English poetry;<sup>3</sup> it was no less dominant in Australia. And so Adamson used that tight stanzaic form in 'The Imitator', a form that gives the illusion of rhyme; and the *envoi* was composed in tight half-rhymes, to show that he was capable of the traditional crafts. The binding of the explosive into the tight framework of emphatic rhythmic return creates its literary tension. The strict formal structure, with its rather prissily archaic *proem* and *envoi* were the necessary price to pay for

the introduction of the raw content. Now a free man, Adamson found he had to put his muse behind bars in order to write about being behind bars:

Watch him, serving out his year in this neutral atmosphere –  
He passes time acting queer.  
Indifference prompts his arrogantly deliberate stance –  
The screws watch, heads askance.

Artistic freedom, freedom of expression, these slogans of the free world had a particular poignancy for Adamson, embarked on his poetic course. In one sense the freedom of the artist as we see it in our contemporary world seems ideal. No patron requiring a topic, no state or party requiring a line. The world lies all before you. But it is the freedom of the freed slave, who finds there is no role, no function there; a free-market economy that offers no support. This was the problem that confronted Henry Kendall. What does a poet do in this society? How do you be a poet? Kendall tried by celebrating the deaths of public figures and the topography of local landscapes to attach poetry to the world of public affairs, to places that might develop a significance in the worlds of geographers, bush walkers, tourists, developers. He tried to materialise his belief in the social function of the poet. He cannot be said to have succeeded in most of the public poems of memorial and occasion. But the invocations of the bush, the rivers, the plants and birds, the natural topography, survive as romantic correlatives for private feelings, feelings, for all their privacy, there to be shared. Kendall is read and remembered for those plangent, weird, watery invocations of nature and for the story of his own sadness.

Confronted by this same lack of a public role for poetry some hundred years later, Adamson like Kendall was uneasy about making himself the centre of his poems. There was a temptation to exploit the prison years; the sensation value of them was a way of gaining attention, and a poet has to gain attention. But it was not the attention he wanted; he wanted attention turned away from these experiences onto the poetry. But in the absence of a public role for poetry, to reject those ready-made materials would seem wanton. There was a waiting place for poems of imprisonment in the literary world. But was there any place for poems of freedom?

Prison poet, latter-day Villon or Genet, was not an image Adamson cared to exploit. 'The Imitator' achieved wide currency. It was a poetry accessible, forceful; a strong metrical energy, a living language. But it was the formal issues that primarily concerned Adamson; this was the dominant concern, the critical consensus of that



time. And so there was a careful emphasis on craft, on verbal effects, on idiom ringing true, on cadence; all this done with as new a language as possible, a living vocabulary of contemporary speech. When he turned to the prison materials in his second book of poems, *The Rumour* (1970)<sup>4</sup> it was even more wryly, even more sardonically:

As the crack up came on  
There was nobody to blame and I confessed for hours  
Until the police were in tears.

For the concern of *The Rumour* was poetry itself; poetry, and the writing of poetry, were now foregrounded as the subject. 'Seven Odes to Themselves' begins

So the first ode kicks off  
into its own life: our Skipper, who steers  
clear of ocean's gender  
moves about like crazy dactylic hexameters in Greek,  
in a sort of metrical algebra.

The title of the first ode, '*Should avoid coming to grips with love*', indicates an awareness of a central evasion in this self-referentialism, the avoidance of the subject, of the human. In one sense it was in happy avoidance of the subject – the institutional years he would rather forget – that Adamson entered his formalist period. He welcomed the socially accepted evasion.

But it was also because he wanted to become a poet. Becoming a poet was the new subject. And with 'The Rumour', the twenty-five-page title poem of his second volume, he writes about this. The abstract mode, and his questioning of it, record the process of his engaging with open-field poetry, moving away from Lowell to the postmodernism of the Black Mountain poets like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, and to the work in particular of Robert Duncan. The poem was a dialogue with the work of Duncan especially, an attempt to make connections over there, just as Christopher Brennan had written to Mallarmé with the same hopes.<sup>5</sup> But instead of writing a letter enclosing poems, as Brennan had done, Adamson made the poem his personal communication, packing it with the results of a minutely close study of Duncan's poems. Following the aesthetic of the priority of the poetry to the life, of the created artifact and imagination to lived experience, to the confines of realism, Adamson proposes to enter Robert Duncan's existence by ordering the lines of his verse; if poetry is so powerful and all important as they say, then he will take them literally and attempt to manipulate social reality by poetry. This is section 2 of Part

### Three of 'The Rumour':

These poets on poetry  
continue to infest the barrel of his  
preamble locked in  
rough non-conformity he works  
the verse into rumour  
my freedom expanding  
as he writes as an american  
without extemporising with  
those intricate  
  
evasions going about his  
life listing a few things  
he just happens to like  
(Robert Duncan, I'll make a pact  
with you, I've  
loved you long enough) Zukofsky  
and Jack Spicer  
who's dead now make him jealous  
even here  
Sydney                    monday 24/5/64  
where he works on making things his freedom  
a slanted truth  
(this is the point  
where whoever's reading this  
is forced into deciding  
whether these lines are  
turning to poetry)  
Now experience moves  
counter-clockwise how for instance he can  
take Zukofsky and Spicer  
away from Duncan  
as an american on monday underway  
without persona ordering  
lines of Duncan's verse  
against all he may believe in (I'm trying  
to let everything fall away)

Adamson's attempt to manipulate social reality was successful. Robert Duncan came to Australia to visit him in 1977. And in *Ground Work: Before the War* (1984) Duncan's 'Go, My Songs, Even as You Came To Me' is glossed as '(after Robert Adamson's opening song in his *Swamp Riddles*)'.<sup>6</sup> But at the same time this verbal play must also work as poetry – 'this is the point / where whoever's reading this / is

forced into deciding / whether these lines are / turning to poetry'. Adamson declares his complete commitment to the mode, though not without recognising the cost, the exclusions – writing 'as an american', and 'those intricate / evasions' – and not without admitting his sense of how problematic an experiment he was engaged upon. It is this wider, warier sense that gives 'The Rumour' its tension.

Historically we can now see this poetic moment of self-referential poetry, of poetry about its own processes, as the verbal equivalent of abstract expressionism in painting. They can both be seen as the aesthetic of the Cold War, with social and political content firmly excluded, and modernist abstractions and commitment to spontaneity privileged. The asserted freedoms were freedoms of the will, displays of anarchic individualism. The art was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency through the Museum of Modern Art as part of the ideological and cultural battle being waged by the United States of America<sup>7</sup> – to show that the U. S. A. had artists, artists who were modern and who could be presented as more innovative, more modern, than Soviet Socialist Realism or European humanism. The mode's usability by the governmental apparatus suggests its innate politics. In the end it doesn't say very much, other than express a dehumanisation, disintegration and decadence.

Yet at the same time the self-referentialism of the poetry also contained a potentially progressive aspect. It reveals something of the nature of poetry. It has its analogies with Bertolt Brecht's alienation effects. By revealing, by foregrounding the literariness of the poem, the poetic can be demystified. We are reminded that this is fabrication. Adamson was later to write 'The Glorious Lie'; is imitation the basis of art? Is there a difference between creation and imitation, between inspiration and fabrication? And can anyone tell the difference?

Spreading its wings the Rumour grows taking  
over the verse  
my freedom a list of lies  
no longer perpetuates its  
life. There's been no  
other preparation than  
devices being handed down  
through poetry.

The strength of Adamson's poem lies not just in the successful imitation of the open-field poem, but in the questioning of it; turning the self-referentialism of the

poetry a further turn, so that 'The Rumour' is a poem about whether poems about poems are the way to go about writing poems:

it can't come  
from this  
sad improvisation  
my two-fisted  
education  
& the poetry  
scares  
the tone  
of his voice  
ruptures.

The open-field poem, the words filling the area of the page, shrinks to this doubtful, unconfident column trickling down the page:

so what to make  
of that.

With 'The Rumour' Adamson successfully established himself as a postmodernist poet. He distanced himself from the quasi-autobiographical figure of 'The Imitator' by becoming a new imitator. And yet having had, and put aside, those experiences, he wondered about the implied discounting of experience and privileging of poetry and pure language:

I write because  
I have to Hart Crane has had his  
day & if my

pen is to be my spokesman  
a muse can't be created by  
the poem's process.

This wondering about the open-field poem, the true dialogue with it, gives 'The Rumour' its life, where the merely inert imitations of the mode, the replications of its visual appearance, without that questioning, now as ever have little to say to us.

O the cold flame  
grown long in language,  
returns bitterly my conventional improvisation;  
takes up from here  
contriving tones. Separate notes

no longer cohere,  
                    and sounding  
fly without radiance: only derivation  
brings to bear

the new mode.  
To ride the Open Song.  
So the ideas slanted against war  
struggle free; the lyric  
obstructed by sexual fury breaks forth, leaps  
insatiable.

At this poetic climax, sparks of meaning are struck into life: social and psychological, political and emotional reference is reasserted even at the moment of the final abstraction. The war in Vietnam, the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, could not be repressed. Issues of life and death, destruction and creation, refuse to be displaced by the preoccupation with the aesthetic of surfaces. Or is it a case of the proper preoccupation with aesthetic surfaces leading to the release and expression of reference, of content, of issues of life and death?

Having discovered the poetry, there was still the search for the subject. Self-referential postmodernism might gain the respect of other poets of that aesthetic, but was comparatively obscure for a wider audience. Of course, obscurity was still, at this point, highly valued as a mark of art. Satire had traditionally been obscure, partly since pejorative references to individuals and politics were necessarily allusive, oblique. Persius's Latin was hard to understand and translate, so that Elizabethan and Jacobean satirists cultivated obscurity to seem like Persius. But by the time of the modern movement there was little satire, little political reference left in poetry. Obscurity was appropriated as the mark of high poetic art, the insignia of the elite, while the problematic content that once had necessitated the obscurity was silently left behind.

In the mid-1970s, prison writers had become something of a vogue. Here was Adamson with his hot, fashionable material which he preferred to forget, did not enjoy recollecting, and the cult of which he deeply suspected. Already Bruce Hanford had locked Adamson up and co-written with him a prose account of his prison experiences. Locked up again to write about being locked up was all very traumatic. The ensuing work, *Zimmer's Essay*, veered between the poles of exposé journalism, American sociological study (Hanford was an American) and railway newsstand

fiction used for committed ends. Serialised in *The Digger*, it had considerable impact. Again, the success was ambivalent to Adamson. He wanted to be loved for his art not his sufferings; for the imagination, not for receiving society's blows. Sardonicly he produced 'Sonnets to be Written from Prison' which he included in *Zimmer's Essay* when it was published in book form – a complex qualification and enhancement of the prose work.<sup>8</sup> They are in Part II: 'Some More Experiences', Adamson laconically entitled it. Experiences came to have the resonance in Adamson's vocabulary that 'adventure' did for Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer: 'it was a grand adventure, and mysterious, and so it hit him where he lived.'<sup>9</sup> The enigmatic quality of the experiences is underlined by the title of the book of poems in which Adamson collected them, *Swamp Riddles* (1974).<sup>10</sup> 'Sonnets to be Written from Prison' are hypothetical future poems to exploit the journalistic vogue for prison writings, poems that in their hypotheticalness were poems about poems, poems that privileged the imagination.

O to be 'in the news' again – now as fashion runs  
 everything would go for 'prison sonnets': I'd be on my own.  
 I could, once more, go out with pale skin  
 from my veritable dank cell –

These are powerful, caustic poems, poems in which the poet argues with himself and with those around him, with the media focus on prison writers, with the liberal assumptions of prison reform groups.

Imagine writing prison sonnets four years after my release.  
 If only all my memories could be made taciturn  
 by inventing phrases like: imagine the solitary police.

Again a strict form is used, as with 'The Imitator'. Now a sonnet serves as the imprisoning grid. But that formality, that strange harking back to a traditional renaissance form like the sonnet is qualified and confronted by the sardonic diction, with the almost contemptuous, derisory observation of the troublesome bondage of rhyming:

Here's the world – maybe what's left of it held  
 together by an almost experimental sonnet.  
 Surely there must be some way out of poetry other than  
 Mallarmé's: still-life with bars and shitcan.

In that collocation, 'Mallarmé's: still-life with bars and shitcan', so much is said; it is

a hieroglyph of compression. The contemptuous diction and the perfunctory rhyme of it/sonnet have their honoured tradition, too, of course – via Byron back to Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*. And for all his resistance to dealing with the prison material, Adamson nonetheless does confront it:

I won't be clever –  
all the clever crims are not inside the prisons.

That is the social message to take away. While the repressed issue, the avoided issue, is the suffering. In these imaginary sonnets, or these sonnets of an imaginary prison, 'I'm not in pain.' The point being that in the real situation there is a lot of pain. And what are the motives of those who want to write or read about pain? The tone of these sonnets is unique. They are an amazing blend of irony, self-mockery, Baudelairean contempt for the hypocrite reader, and wonderment at this world of poetry, at this occupation where making fake confessions was so publicly rewarded:

I dreamed I saw the morning editions settle on the court –  
emblazoned with my name, my *story* so glib it made  
no sense. The judge said 'emotional' but I thought  
of the notoriety. This was the outward world, my sad tirade  
was 'news'. – Though, if I'd been rhyming sonnets  
in solitary, my suffering alone could've made them *art*.  
Now, imagine an illiterate in prison – but I've no regrets  
I enjoy my lagging, I feel sorry for the warders.

The social issues are inextricably intertwined with the issues of poetry and abstraction. At the moment when he is discovering literary abstraction, pursuing the successors of Mallarmé, there has arisen a cult of realist prison writing. Or supposedly realist. Suddenly Adamson has perceived the possibility of making it all up in a way both satisfying that symbolist privileging of the imagination, and the true realism of prison – making up stories, statements, confessions, lies. 'There, I love confessions.' 'My *story* so glib it made / no sense.' Here is a practical use of the imagination: survival. The socially acceptable lie, the publicly acclaimed evasion. Art for art's sake, the poem concerned with poetry, has its social relevance and uses after all.

As much as 'experiences', 'the imagination' was one of Adamson's recurrent touchstones. And *Cross the Border* (1977),<sup>11</sup> his next collection, is nothing if not a work of the imagination. As 'Lovesong', the opening poem, declares, *Cross the*

*Border* was very much an experimental volume, continuing the postmodernist open field of *The Rumour*:

into the imaginative cosmos  
and then out beyond order, language adrift,  
exploding, moving through  
and taking me forward from here.

Included, too, were wider explorations, tentative verbal and technical experiments, cut-ups, partial erasures, spontaneity, pastiche. The extraordinary luxuriant book production, the cover with a painting from not one but two Sydney artists – Brett Whiteley and Gary Shead – might suggest something of an artistic over-determination. This has perhaps fixed those tentative sketches into encrusted stalactites, the charm of spontaneity congealed into some more concrete grotesquerie. Adamson has perhaps not always been successful in his experiments with presentation, but it is in the nature of experiment that not everything succeeds. The important thing is the attempt, the refusal of inert unthinkingness. In *Swamp Riddles* he removed the titles of most of the poems in an attempt to stimulate a coherent volume, in imitation of and tribute to Christopher Brennan's *Poems* [1913], whose presentation as a *livre composé* had been elucidated by G. A. Wilkes in his facsimile reissue of that volume.<sup>12</sup> The consequence was a puzzling obscurity – the removal of individual titles left the volume difficult of access, shorn of signposts and handrails. His *Selected Poems* (1977),<sup>13</sup> that appeared in the same year as *Cross the Border*, shares in this experimental impetus, offering rewritings, reworked versions, different renderings of the earlier poems here collected. These are experiments that show an openness to trying something new, to revitalising the old, an eclectic Poundian openness to the huge variety of literary tradition and effect.<sup>14</sup>

In *Cross the Border* part of the effect and purpose was the enigmatic. He writes in 'Some Notes About the River':

Information is withheld now, memory flies forward into darkness,  
because there is no proof that it is information.  
How do you know if this isn't some curious attempt to convince you,  
to take you into the soothing stream of rhetoric  
If you have detected some verbal game-playing, and are still reading,  
there should be more response  
than a cynical baffled annoyance or bemusement.  
More than a delight in recognition.



The enigmatic, the mysterious, the intimations of a withheld secret knowledge, permeate *Cross the Border*. There are implications of magic, conjurations of myth. Here was the grand old man of the sea of Sydney's new poetry, broken-armed, forked-tongued, medicine man of curses and hunter of the Holy Grail, driving an Alfa Romeo and living in Elizabeth Bay.

Kendall is the poet of rills, running water, fast flowing rivulets, mountains. Adamson is the poet of the mangrove swamps, that ambiguous region half underwater, half-exposed, half river estuary, half salt water, the primal soup, visions of mud wrestling, the liquid lava of some Pompeian setting, outcast, woebegone, ramshackle. And this primal landscape, seascape, mudscape, riverscape became the setting for poems of sexual discovery, outlaw adventure. The themes are announced in *Swamp Riddles* and developed in *Cross the Border*. Kendall's images of running water, refreshing streams in secret places, represent both alcohol and sexuality – the warring poles of joint distraction from his central pursuit of being a poet; and the private themes, inexpressible in any other way, are displaced into implicit imagery. Adamson, writing in a less inhibited age, can write explicitly about sexuality, alcohol and drugs. But his mangrove swamps and mudflats bear no less than Kendall's rills and torrents the same burden of resonance, the same associations of sexuality and of muddy oblivion.

In *Where I Come From* (1979)<sup>15</sup> Adamson broke through into a brilliant, firm clarity. The experiments with poetic possibility had been absorbed. The haunting images of the Hawkesbury are now focused on to childhood events – real or imagined, revealed or fantasised; the archetypes of what might have been. Here speaks the spirit of the mangroves and the mudflats. The setting is the correlative for a mood: the events express a certain attitude.

#### THE HOLIDAY

We visit my Grandfather  
at the Hawkesbury River  
in his old wooden house  
that he has repainted  
British Racing Green outside  
and brown inside  
My best cousin Sandy  
is staying for the weekend too  
She wants me to go with her  
away from the rest of them

because they always want her to be  
more like a girl  
and make her wear  
dresses and things  
The backyard goes down to the river  
it's covered with wild pumpkin  
and the chooks have taken it over  
and go for you  
when you pass them  
Dad has got three hens  
spinning on the clothes line headless  
the other chooks crazy  
eating up the splattered blood  
me and Sandy get one of the cats  
and spin it too.

This was childhood regained and mediated through LSD-25 – not the unrecoverable experience, but a fabrication by chemical means. The image in the electron microscope is no less a fiction and our science is built on it. It is not easy to write about childhood trauma, about parents, about families. The necessary ambiguity of fictionalisation, fantasisation is there for protection: the retractable truth of the surreal. And what in our dramatisations of childhood hurts and fears, trauma or melodrama, is the creation of rhetoric and self-justification, and what the truth ever was, who knows? These are stories about a storyteller, poems about a poet, telling stories is part of the subject matter.

ON SATURDAYS  
I'd walk with Sandy to town  
so Mr Darcy could see us  
holding hands and kissing  
we'd pinch bottles of his oysters  
and take them to the pictures  
and eat them out of each other's mouth  
or spit them down our shirts  
We thought we had probably  
committed mortal sin even more times  
than Mandy Kerslake  
I'd tell Sandy stories about  
what hell was like  
It was one great mudflat  
and our punishment would be to  
suck out each other's eyes.

The images bear their symbolic overlay – not just the Freudian interpretations which for all their familiarity we cannot for that reason simply reject, but also less conceptualisable fears, anxieties, threats.

AT HOME

Then one day you have to fight  
your father  
He comes forward saying hit me  
you go for his throat  
and you are fighting your Dad  
and Mum starts screaming  
and your brothers hope you win  
It's because he knows what you think  
about him sleeping with Mum.

It is a remarkable sparseness, a simple clarity of language, an absolute dispensing with unnecessary words, yet without moving into that cryptic minimalism that becomes obscure in itself. There is no hiding behind flashy image, verbal ambiguity, literary allusion. This is very hard to do, psychically as well as technically. Such verbal clarity can come only from many, many pages of writing, from a continual immersion in the medium to be able to use its essence so clearly, confidently, accurately. The return to childhood is not an easy nostalgia. The ambience is far more menacing than that would allow. Fear, violence, aggression permeate the episodes. There is a sure, firm, spare clarity – something won through to, something perfectly achieved.

The mangrove celebrations, the Hawkesbury world, are the establishment of a distinctive, Australian image that will stand equally with the contemporary international – something Kendall was similarly trying to do with the same district. Adamson's 'The Mullet Run' in *Cross the Border* is set in that same Mooney Creek celebrated by Kendall; there is a shared blackness, but a century of difference in language. It is a hillbilly, backwoods world Adamson evokes. And hillbilly culture in its various manifestations was a major part of Adamson's musical interest – the electric Villon balladiers like Jimmy Buffet, Doug Kershaw, J. J. Cale and various strands of country music, part of the folk heritage Bob Dylan led into, Johnny Cash perhaps the best known of them. Hillbillying troubadours, the Bohemians of a new world, not cafe society but more like the poor white origins of an Elvis Presley. River people, marginal people: Adamson evokes a distinctive and recognisable aspect of the world of the poor. In 'Growing Up Alone' part 6 he writes:

The backyard to our grandfather's  
was the Hawkesbury River  
and me and Sandy hated it  
It meant all the kids at Gosford  
knew how poor we were

because only fishermen lived there  
and we hated it ...

A haunting concept Adamson has worked with in his poetry is that of the imitator, the forger, the con man. Perhaps one of the reasons for the uneasiness about Adamson's work amongst the reviewers and academics and arts administrators is the fear that he may be putting them on. As someone once asked Robert Creeley – a poet whose presence is much felt in *Cross the Border* – 'Is that a real poem or did you just make it up yourself?'<sup>16</sup> Of course it is a mark of contemporary, literary insecurity, the uncertainty about values and meanings, the lack of any shared sense of what poetry is, what cultural production is, or could be, that this eroding anxiety should have created such an abyss of unease. And Adamson plays on this anxiety. But the playing is not merely a provoking of the defensive reader, a challenge to hypocrisies: it is a questioning of what constitutes art, of what poetry is. The theme is confronted in 'Beyond the Pale', the opening poem of his most recent collection, *The Law at Heart's Desire* (1982).<sup>17</sup>

On the way we notice coloured ensigns  
emblazoned onto the windows  
of the final service stations – the winged horses,  
golden rams, scallop shells; the night neon  
pulsing through their skin.  
I think I remember you saying something like:  
if a thing is made well enough,  
it has a soul, the craft itself imparts  
the craftsman's. I looked again – the soul  
of a glass scallop? – and again marveled  
at your carpenter's trust for the next fifty miles.

This privileging of technique, this technological vision of art for art's sake that would ultimately judge the world's cultural production by the standard of a Disneyland, is the aesthetic of our society's materialism. It follows the model of engineering and architectural functionalism, without the admission of any prior function. Well made, but for what?

A central theme of *The Law at Heart's Desire* is marital relationship; the issues of form and formalism are urgently there for the poet, but they are issues of discovering the appropriate form to write honestly, as well as powerfully, of human relationships, human dishonesties. That is not easy. There have been many centuries of poetry about love and marriage, but how much of it has been honest? How much was idealising, rationalising, self-justifying, self-dramatising? The simplicities of language and form that Adamson attains to in these poems are simplicities and clarities reached through to after the consideration of other possibilities, other models. As with the poems of childhood in *Where I Come From*, there is a sure, transpicuous poise:

THE HOME, THE SPARE ROOM

I am the poet of the spare room  
the man who lives here  
with television's  
incessant coloured noise  
between the ads keeping the children  
at bay  
At night I walk the seagrass  
down the hall  
my head rolls before me  
like some kind of a round dice  
which room tonight?  
I think of my wife-to-be  
who has thrown herself down  
into a foetal shape onto her bed  
I am a hard man, a vicious seer  
who simply wants  
to go on living – love is beyond me  
if it exists – my heart,  
so called, is as efficient as a bull's  
and as desperate  
for the earth's treasures –  
I turn into the spare room  
and begin to write a poem of infinite  
tenderness.

This concern with the function of art, the role for poetry, continues in *The Law at Heart's Desire*. It is not an issue on which Adamson ever sits back with comfortable certainty. It is always problematical for him, as surely it is for any serious artist. In 'Friend' he looks at what forces, what images, an artist draws into being.

We start with a face though already  
begin to imagine more  
'There is the suggestion of violent forces being invoked  
whose face is this  
we want to know something strange now  
fear asks *Where!*  
face face face we reply.

In 'A Final Spring' he looks at the illusions:

We loved and talked our way clear  
through a war, everything  
seemed possible to us, even poetry.

What are the characteristics of Adamson's tone? It is knowing, self-knowing, self-aware. There is a mockery of delusion, a self-mockery. There is a commitment to the overriding demands of art and a quizzical wondering that art can be seen to be prior to the demands of life. There is a delicate evocation of sensuality, and a sense of the way this pursuit of the sensual life is an illusion screening us from things we find it convenient to be screened from. Wars and revolutions are only ever marginal; but that marginality is not unaware, not unconscious. It is not that war or revolution is perceived as the real issue, more important than love or art. Though it might be. Certainly repressing consideration of it by a focus on love or art is no way ever to find out. The social is always there as a context, even in as seemingly formalist a volume as *Cross the Border*; in 'The Mullet Run'

There's too many fish for the co-op  
and even if half of them rot  
before we get back  
we'll glut the market.

The invocations and addresses and allusion to poets like Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan running through the poetry of his formalist preoccupations are now absent. Their influences have been absorbed: now Adamson writes with the confidence and sureness of an accepted practitioner, without any colonial, dependent status. 'Visiting Francis Webb' pays tribute to the poet he admired most of all his Australian predecessors – yet another tragic figure in that long line from Kendall onwards, a fitting note on which to conclude:

He sat in front of me and focused on some  
point in the visiting-room above  
my head and as I spoke about his work  
in the art and in the house of love  
he said: I no longer write verse, my books  
do not sell, they have all been  
remaindered from the shelves – these  
days I read only two things  
*The Sydney Morning Herald* and this  
old book of praise *The Hymns* ...  
His looks? His madness? His grey hair?  
His eyes floating in the polished air.

The Fifteenth Herbert Blaiklock Memorial Lecture, University of Sydney, 17  
September 1985. *Southerly*, 46, 1986. Reprinted *Australian Literature Today*,  
ed. R. K. Dhawan and David Kerr, Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies  
and Advent Press, New York, 1993.

## **Robert Adamson and Bruce Hanford, *Zimmer's Essay***

Rumour has it that journalist Bruce Hanford kept poet Robert Adamson locked in a room to make him write this novel. Based on Adamson's experiences in reform school and gaol, it is a searing, horrifying account of the prison system, intercut with some sociological information on penology. The book stops rather than ends. It is a fractured, fragmented production, and it is through this very refusal of a determining, resolving shape that its force is expressed. Adamson is one of Australia's foremost poets. This powerful novel cum memoir, originally serialised in *Digger*, and later dramatised, has a frightful authenticity, and a compelling, enthralling and horrifying readability.

*The Good Reading Guide*, ed. Helen Daniel, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1989.



## Robert Adamson, *The Clean Dark*

Robert Adamson's *The Clean Dark* is a major volume from a distinguished poet. It marks a distinct and substantial development from his previous volumes. The topography of the Hawkesbury region that Adamson has so successfully celebrated in the past is the site of a return to a new depth and seriousness. The natural environment is succinctly and indelibly recorded, and the works and acts of humanity in that environment are recorded in a clear-eyed, unforgettable way. 'The river is like a blank page'; Adamson continues his modernist project with this creation of poetry out of absence, the recourse to the 'imagination.'

*The Clean Dark*, Paperbark Press, Sydney, 1989.

# Vicki Viidikas

Vicki Viidikas was one of the most brilliant talents of the reawakened Australian literary scene of the late 1960s and 70s. She blazed through the inner-city worlds of Balmain and East Sydney and the alternative settlements of the North and South Coasts of New South Wales, with an unforgettable intensity.

She wrote directly from experience and her whole life was a commitment to seeking out experience, to capturing the authentic. Her stories and poems captured the mood of that heady moment of creativity, and gave expression in a unique and direct idiom to what so many of her contemporaries felt. 'Her writing is strong and honest, and she needs no tricks or games,' wrote Anne Summers.

Born in Australia of an Estonian father and an Australian mother, and claiming descent from Ned Kelly's family, she left school at fifteen. She worked at a series of casual jobs, including a spell in Abbey's bookshop, a focus for readers and writers in Sydney. She was married for a time to the painter Bob Finlayson. In the 1970s she received some support from Literature Board fellowships.

Balmain in the late 1960s and early 70s was home to a horde of writers and publications. Viidikas was a striking, effervescent figure around the pubs, the parties and the waterfront readings of those years. Her poems appeared in Nigel Roberts's *Free Poetry*, in Robert Adamson's *New Poetry*, and in Tom Shapcott's anthology *Australian Poetry Now*. Her first book, *Condition Red*, was published in 1973, an early volume in the University of Queensland Press Paperback Poets series. The original manuscript was voluminous. It had to be reduced to suit the series' format, something done with much agony and exasperation. The collection made an immediate impact.

She was also a fiction writer of genius. Her stories appeared in *Tabloid Story*, *Westerly* and English poet Jon Silkin's international quarterly *Stand*. They were collected in one of the first titles from Wild and Woolley, *Wrappings* (1974). It was a powerful volume that gave memorable voice to the anguishes and ecstasies of her encounters with the world. 'The realities of a woman's life,' the *USA Small Press Review* described it.

This was before women's writing had become a part of the literary agenda of Australia. In this, as in her technical experiments, she was a true innovator. She received distinguished recognition. 'As for V. V.,' Christina Stead wrote, 'her portraits of men instant and sharp, could only have been done by a girl who took those chances and had talent. She has tremendous talent.'<sup>1</sup>

Two more collections of poetry followed, *Knabel* (Wild and Woolley, 1978) and *India Ink* (Hale & Iremonger, 1984). But what should have been a significant literary career failed to eventuate. It was not that she ceased to write. She continued to write voluminously, producing stories and poems, and an amazing novel that ranged from Sydney in the 1970s to India in the 1980s. But the world of publishers and editors found her difficult, and she in turn found them contemptible. She remained true to her art, refused to compromise, continued to write, but except for rare appearances in magazines and anthologies, effectively ceased to publish.

She travelled widely – in India, her especial love, in the Middle East and Europe. She remained adamant in her refusal of the comfortable and the conventional. As Christina Stead recognised, she took chances. In that time-honoured tradition of the avant-garde artist, she preferred Bohemia to bourgeois existence, and she preferred the demi-monde to Bohemia. In later years she became a myth, lost to view of the literary world that she had inspired, stimulated, informed and reviled.

It is a tragedy and a scandal that so comparatively small a part of her work appeared in print. The Australian Defence Academy Library acquired a collection of her papers. Other manuscripts were deposited, through the years, with friends for safekeeping. Now that she is dead and no longer able to impede its publication, no doubt her writing will begin to appear and achieve cult status. It deserves it.

*The Australian*, 11 December 1998.

## Vicki Viidikas, *Wrappings*

Vicki Viidikas' *Wrappings* (Wild & Woolley, Sydney, 1974) is a collection of stories and sketches that has not dated since its first publication in 1974. Set in the inner-city worlds of Kings Cross, East Sydney and Balmain, they explore the multifarious experiences of sex and drugs. They capture the ecstasies and liberations and, no less clear-eyed, record the exploitations and betrayals. It is a world of exploitation, the economic exploitation of dealers and prostitution, and the exploitation in men-women relationships. But the stories are written with a lightness and liveliness and freshness that make Vicki Viidikas one of the great originals of Australian fiction. Her commitment was to the authentic, to writing directly from experience. She wrote as she lived.

*Wrappings* appeared before 'women's writing' was on every multinational publisher's agenda. It was a pioneering work in that aspect, but it was equally pioneering in its aesthetic and its technique. The spontaneity of Viidikas's writing had a profound influence on me in the 1970s. As for her personality, no less influential, I tried to capture aspects of her as Valda in the novel I wrote at that time, *The Short Story Embassy*. She introduced me to the work of Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and Anais Nin, but it is her own work that had an especial impact. She died 27 November 1998, and much of her writing remains unpublished. But *Wrappings* still remains in print.

*Sydney City Hub*, 4, 18, 17–23 December 1998.

## Vicki Viidikas, *New and Rediscovered*

For Vicki Viidikas, life and writing were inextricable. She spun her writing out of the life she lived. She wrote and travelled endlessly, up and down the coast of Australia from Melbourne to Mullumbimby, through Thailand, India, Israel, England, France and Greece. In part it was the hippy trail, an ongoing search for experience, excess and enlightenment. She empathised with the varieties of religious experience she encountered, while remaining detached. She did a lot of drugs. She followed the path of the wandering troubadour. It is an honourable tradition. Arguably, it is the true tradition.

This makes it sound too abstract. Vicki's writing was always vivid and precise, focusing on the telling detail, on the sharp-eyed observation. From the control-freak cocaine dealer in his waterside apartment to the menacing yet alluring Indian monkey-man, she could summon up situations of extraordinary power and subtlety.

Like the great jazz singers she so admired, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, Vicki's voice is always recognisable, always effortless. There is nothing that sounds rehearsed or over-produced. She aimed for spontaneity. 'Trying to catch the voice' she calls one piece. To call her a stylist is misleading – or so she would no doubt have thought. Her whole project was to be free of affectation, of manner, of precedent. But her clarity, her directness, her visionary evocations and surreal connections have the characteristic note of an assured, spare, vividly colourful modernism. You do not achieve spontaneity like Vicki's without years of commitment.

Vicki emerged as a writer in the mid-1960s. She chronicles the era of what seemed at the time like liberation, one of the first to record the sexual and drug revolution. She eagerly seized the opportunity to record what had rarely been written about explicitly before, a world of gays, lesbians, prostitutes, rapists and their victims, drug-dealers and their junky clients. These are sketches from the life, not narratives manufactured for commercial gain or propagandist agenda. Vicki presented no agenda: other than the agenda of the clear-eyed writer, the Isherwood 'I am a camera.' There were precedents, of course: Rimbaud, Anna Kavan, Leroi Jones, and she knew their work. Like every serious writer, she read widely and intensely.

She follows on from D. H. Lawrence in her portrayal of the crackling tensions of male-female relationships. She vividly portrays a remorseless parade of unsatisfactory men, like the awful Austrian dope-freak in India, concerned only with procuring the best hash, the young village boy in Crete whose possessiveness turns to violence, and the casual pick-ups after a party in Sydney or a carnival in Paris.

Thirty-five years after they were written, her searing attacks on male self-involvement and overall unsatisfactoriness still make me flinch. No doubt they should, since a couple were written at me. Not written for me, or to me, but confrontationally at me. Writing was part of an ongoing dialogue with the world for Vicki and other writers of the 1970s. Pre-dating blogs and the web, it was a direct and instant medium of exchange, inviting rapid response. We used to respond to each other's stories and poems with stories and poems in reply. It was not a matter of manufacturing a product and marketing it. Of course, some were doing that and have been most successful. But that was a world for which Vicki had nothing but scorn.

*New and Rediscovered* (Transit Lounge, Melbourne, 2010) is a marvellous selection from her stories, sketches, and poems, together with an extract from her still unpublished novel, *Kali and the Dung Beetle*. It is a compelling experience. The poems, sharp, fluent and accessible, can be read like sketches. And the sketches build up a memorable portfolio of the Bohemian underbelly of the twentieth century. Arranged pretty well chronologically, the selection has its inexorable narrative development, the drugs getting harder, the sexual partners getting younger, the writer getting older. Though not that old. She was just 50 when she died in 1998.

Roberto Bolano's *The Savage Detectives* has achieved cult status with its portrayal of young Latin-American writers in their pursuit of sex, drugs and literature in the 1970s. With this selection from the work of Vicki Viidikas, the publisher of Transit Lounge, Barry Scott, has assembled the materials for a cult native to our own culture. Vicki would have been wryly amused. But with that puckered smile of satisfaction. It was worth it, after all, despite the cost. But it was at a cost, and she paid the price.

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15–16 May 2010.

## Morris Lurie, *Welcome to Tangier*

I was talking to some foreign students. 'How would you characterise Australian literature?' they asked, 'our literature is characterised as melancholy and depressing.' 'Australian literature can be pretty melancholy and depressing, too,' I said, thinking of Clarke, Lawson, White. 'But there are comic writers.' 'Who?' they asked. Steele Rudd, I thought, surely there is someone else, someone modern, Morris Lurie of course, thank heavens for Morris Lurie.

Morris Lurie is one of our few genuinely comic writers. But even Lurie has his melancholy note. *Welcome to Tangier* (Penguin, Ringwood, 1997) is a delightful combination of the comic and the melancholy. Its subject is the writing life, of great potential for farce or tragedy. The first part, 'Becoming Barker' deals with the writer in the present; the second, 'Welcome to Tangier', looks back at the writer in embryo, at the very outset of his career. The structure allows for all sorts of unspoken comparisons.

Solitariness, for instance. In each group of ten stories the writer lives alone. But whereas in 'Welcome to Tangier' the young Barker is unattached, unencumbered, eager for experience, in 'Becoming Barker' he is in retreat from community, has shed or been shed by wife and family. Friends meet him for lunch in order to borrow money, come to stay and involve him in driving them endlessly across the city. Holed up in 'the restored wing of the Palace of Versailles he calls his humble home', this is the writer embattled. 'Barker doesn't own a television, doesn't listen to the radio, hasn't bought or read a newspaper for it has to be at least seven years, who needs such poison? Barker's philosophy, why would you voluntarily admit such reeking foulness into your house?'

There is much to agree with in Barker's world view. His feelings for his fêted contemporaries are not much more positive. Stricken down by illness, 'poised between life and death, a quivering needle, attracted both ways,' as his feverish imagination puts it, he turns to his library of unread books – 'he has a whole stack, you understand, if not indeed a mountain, certainly a goodly slope and pile.'

Well, the tome to hand this time, an op shop treasure by the smell of it, yep, five cents it says here scribbled in in pencil, wonder if I managed to beat them

down? is by a roughly contemporary much-lauded and applauded, except to Barker whenever he's tried the writing of this particular fellow, an entirely closed door. Actually not so much closed, in fact not closed at all, but yawning open onto an absolute emptiness, nothing here including not even chickens, no one at all inside the home.

Barker, Barker, says Barker, shaking, oops, careful, his ill-filled head. Oh you writer chappies are all such competitive beasts. Come on, continues Barker to Barker, stern beneath his straw hat, this illness in the deck chair has been given to you for a reason. It is your chance and opportunity to reappraise and reassess. Open your heart to him, Barker. Be honest, by all means. But more than honest. Be fair.

I have quoted at length to allow some impression of Lurie's style in these stories. He has evolved something quite individual. The writing is a self-qualifying monologue, in comic, ironic dialogue with itself, developing as it goes. It incorporates the very process of writing, the hesitations, the cancellings and corrections. It conveys a unique sense of the writer's consciousness, of the flow of ideas, of an immediacy of response. Lurie has always been a professional craftsman. His earlier stories were demonstrably well-made stories. But the well-made, craftsman-like product can appear closed, contained and impersonal. The manner Lurie has now developed is much more tentative and open-ended. It is a stylistic breakthrough at a time when so much contemporary short story production has become dull and routine.

It is not always totally successful. Once or twice the manner became so oblique and tentative that I was unsure what was happening. But that is a price I am happy to pay for some genuine experiment, for the sense of risk taking. There is a freshness and life about these stories, a sense of spontaneity. And the stylistic interest, the excitement of the manner, is never a matter of empty formalism. These pieces are all firmly based in reality. Their very delicacy and slightness, their occasional ephemerality, are the mark of that. This is the writer observing reality, in all its resistance and intransigence. These are not glibly made-up products, but attempts to see the pattern in the daily shapelessness of life. When the material is over-familiar, Lurie avoids the trap of recording the obvious with a confident economy.

A phone call!

A human being is in touch!

....

Hey, it's a pal.

A fellow toiler in the literary field inviting to dinner.

A crowd.



A gathering.

Booze.

Talk.

A more or less regular thing, these dinners, the convening pal (astoundingly decent chap) always arranging a good mix, Barker pleased to be included, a gossip, a plug in, no man is an island, what's doing, what's news, a nice noisy night.

Actually, I'm very sick, says Barker.

The undercurrent of desperation and desolation effectively complements the comedy of the first section. With the second part it is aspiration not desperation. The young Barker, avid for life, arrives in Tangier to write.

I would like to imagine now stepping into a landscape of sunshine and palm trees, because I did, which I did, a smell somehow of chickens, attendant clamour, Arab women, boys, grabbing voices, fingers, drab brown-clad men.

I fled into some sort of cab.

These are charming vignettes of the old international city, but it is a life no less alienated than the stories of the first part. There is little contact with the Arabs, and the expatriates are all quintessentially alienated and adrift. But it provides some fine portraits of the elderly European homosexuals, the hustlers, the would-be writers, the early hippies or late beatniks peopling the city. 'Everyone was writing. Everyone was a writer. Everyone wanted to be a writer. Everyone was trying to write.'

*Welcome to Tangier* is a delightful volume. Lurie has captured the unsatisfactoriness of the times and presented it as comedy. His wit has soothed the abrasiveness of discontent and with an exquisitely light touch offered a loving, delicate celebration of it all, past and present. It is a rare achievement.

*Australian Book Review*, February–March 1997.

## Peter Corris

Whenever Peter and I met towards the end of his life, he would allow a brief three-minute survey of our ills and woes, and then we would say no more about them but move on to more positive issues. The last time we talked I remember saying I was bored and irritable. ‘Oh, I’m bored,’ Peter agreed, ‘but I’m not irritable.’

And he never was. Even when his eyesight had failed to the extent that he could no longer read books or newspapers, and no longer write anything sustained, he was always amazingly genial and positive. There was no self-pity, no despair, as he shifted first to e-books and then to talking books, retaining his interest and discovering new authors. And he still managed to turn out a regular 500-word Godfather column for the *Newtown Review of Books* – and writing the column gave him – and his readers – great satisfaction.

Peter was the most prolific of contemporary Australian writers. I can’t think of anyone who produced more. There were forty-four Cliff Hardy books, plus many other novels, stories, biographies and edited volumes. Yet Peter was always amazingly modest and refreshingly matter of fact about his achievement. He used to say that he had only ever worked for a couple of hours a day all his career. He would write for an hour in the morning, then go to the gym, box, or play golf, have a drink and a bite to eat, write for another hour in the afternoon, have another drink, and that was it. It sounded easy, put like that. He embodied the only sound advice you can give to a would-be writer: Just do it. Just sit down and write. Every day.

It was the everyday bit that was crucial. And that was how Peter wrote. Consistently. Every day. Which was how he produced his phenomenal output. He made it sound so easy, which it isn’t, as we all know. I remember his being asked if he had the plots of his books all worked out in advance of writing them. ‘Oh, no,’ he said, ‘I’d be too bored to write them if I knew what was going to happen.’

Writing the books was a process of discovery. And because of that, they hold your attention throughout, you are carried along with the developments and revelations. Peter, as he readily admitted, was in the tradition of the private-eye novelists Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald. But he also shared qualities with

Simenon – not just in the prolific production of books, but in writing books that are immensely readable, that can be read at a sitting, or if you are disciplined, over two sittings. Crime fiction has over recent years become gross, obese and overblown, five hundred pages of unnecessary detail, furnishings, fashion accessories, background music, foreground music and the rest. Peter avoided all that padding. And he avoided all the gruesome, ghoulish, distasteful and downright weird obsession with serial killers, child abusers, minutely detailed post-mortems, forensics, and the rest of it that have increasingly featured in the genre. There was none of that in Peter's work. Instead there was always a basic decency and humanity about his writing. His books were focussed, firmly paced, economical, easy to read and, in a word, enjoyable.

And he achieved something only a few writers ever manage. He imprinted his vision of Sydney onto the city. When you look for somewhere to park in the side streets of Glebe or Newtown, or when you drive down the coastal road south of Sydney to Wollongong, you are spontaneously reminded of the settings of Peter's novels. You can't go to Bondi without thinking of the empty beach. Not many writers achieve this.

I have said how genial and essentially positive Peter was in his dealing with the world. He was rare amongst writers in being genuinely good-natured – rare amongst any human beings, really. He had his disappointments: he would have liked his other series characters, Box Office Browning and Creepy Crawley, to have had a publisher's backing. But Cliff Hardy was the brand they preferred. And in between fiction he wrote on a number of topics – true crime, biographies – of Fred Hollows, notably – a history of boxing and more.

When Peter's first novel was published in 1980 crime fiction was out of fashion in Australia. Peter brought it back into circulation. It was through his quietly professional and workmanlike commitment to the Cliff Hardy series that Peter single-handedly restored the genre to a central place in Australian writing.

We all gratefully remember him, not only for his literary achievements, but as a generous, genial, kind-hearted companion and friend.

*Newtown Review of Books, September 2018.*

## Peter Corris, *Torn Apart*

*Torn Apart* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2010) is the thirty-fifth book from Peter Corris featuring Cliff Hardy. Older, possibly wiser, bruised and somewhat battered, Cliff has now lost his private investigator's licence. In the previous novel, *Deep Water*, he suffered a heart attack. What else can go wrong?

How about being confronted by his doppelganger? 'The Doppelganger' features in one of the earliest pieces of crime writing published in Australia, a story by Marcus Clarke published in the *Australian Monthly Magazine* in August 1867. It is cheering to find tradition perpetuated, and well-worn themes refusing, like Sherlock Holmes, to lie down and die. It is part of the appeal of crime fiction, the return of the familiar. The psychiatrist Charles Rycroft theorised that the addictive nature of reading detective novels arose from an obsession with the primal scene, returning to the site of seeing your parents having sex. Though Cliff Hardy is never that much into voyeurism, prurience or weird stuff. In the ranks of contemporary criminal investigators, he remains comparatively clean-cut. Not for Corris the serial post-mortems, serial killers and child abusers threatening to colonise the genre.

Even though he has lost his licence, Cliff remains the private investigator. His origin lies with Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe. In a hard-to-get memoir now become a collector's item, *Sweet and Sour: A Diabetic Life* (Southern Cross University Press, 2000), Corris confesses to having 'at first imitated him slavishly.' Such sweet slavery. Movie makers and literary critics call it homage. Or even *hommage*.

There is nothing slavish about Corris now. He writes with a deceptive simplicity and clarity. He records and observes, but this is also point of view fiction. Isherwood's phrase 'I am a camera' captures it. The transparent narrator, whose consciousness nonetheless we share. A private eye but not a hard-boiled one. Nor is there anything of the somewhat overwritten aspect of Chandler. We are not overloaded with smart cracks, nor with their corresponding bursts into elaborate similes, lyrical and sardonic. Corris's writing has developed into a clear, efficient medium. It doesn't draw attention to itself. It knows the requirements of the genre. He isn't moaning along with Ian Rankin and Robert Harris that crime writing is not taken seriously

as High Art. Crime fiction is not High Art. It is entertainment, and Corris is an accomplished and compelling entertainer.

Importantly, he has done it with a private eye. In the era of wall-to-wall police procedure fiction and television, this is a relief. The original great investigators were all private citizens: Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown, Lord Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot. They were independent of the state. Some, like Cliff without his licence, were rank amateurs. They represented a private morality that could operate independently of bureaucratic bumbling, political interference and vested interests.

The shift to police procedure has been a worrying one. It is worse for television than for books: in order to close off the mean streets so that they can be filmed, scripts inevitably have to be submitted for approval by authority, police or governmental. It can lead to a disturbing complicity with the ever-expanding reach of big government. It can all too readily be the mouthpiece of the nanny state. But Cliff Hardy remains incorrigibly his own person.

I must confess to having ignored the earliest Cliff Hardy novels. Back in 1980, when *The Dying Trade* appeared, I felt that the genre was concluded. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett had done it all. Ross Macdonald had made a noble effort at revivification, but had turned the 1930s social observations into a depoliticised focus on the family and generational issues. There was nowhere further to go. I was wrong, of course. Robert B. Parker demonstrated there was life in the old formula yet. And when I finally began reading Corris, I realised the rewards were there as strong as ever.

And there was the pleasure of finding familiar settings. I used to enjoy driving along the precipitous coastal road south of Sydney because it reminded me of the settings of so many Hollywood crime movies. It is a setting Corris has used to good effect. But he is probably more closely associated with Bondi and Darlinghurst, Newtown and Glebe, where Cliff's investigations have led him into an exploration of a unique and characteristic Sydney, in the days before we called such settings iconic. He has captured a particular ambience of both inner city and rich suburban Sydney and made it his own, a familiar, expected and welcome milieu. He has done for Sydney what Raymond Chandler and Robert Crais have done for Los Angeles, Ross Macdonald for Santa Barbara, and Robert B. Parker for Boston. It is easy to underestimate the creative skill here. Yes, those environments exist. The skill lies in evoking what is characteristic, defining, memorable, in the selection and emphasis.

As with another of the great originals, Simenon, Corris's books are never overwritten. There is none of that endless itemisation and padding increasingly found in the longer tomes of contemporary crime fiction, tedious, obvious and make-weight. The Cliff Hardy novels, like Simenon's police procedural Maigret series, are readable at a sitting. It is an art in danger of becoming lost, but one that Simenon cultivated. Of course, you don't have to read the books in one go: you can savour them over two or three days if you are strong-willed.

*Torn Apart* is an excellent addition to the series. As well as the doppelganger, who claims to be Cliff's cousin, there are other new features to the old mix. There is an overseas visit to a Travellers' fair in Ireland – lots of old Micks there. But Cliff soon returns home to his usual stamping grounds. There is another Travellers' get together in Kangaroo Valley. There is a Blackwater-like paramilitary security operation out in the bush. There is an ex-wife (the cousin's). The personal and the political are enigmatically intertwined. The remorseless gentrification of Glebe and Newtown proceeds apace. But not of Cliff. He remains pretty well as rough-hewn and unreconstructed as ever. Despite the depredations of criminals, police and female persons. Which is immensely reassuring.

*Quadrant*, 54, 4, April 2010.

## Peter Corris, *The Colonial Queen*

*The Colonial Queen* (Arcadia, Melbourne, 2011) is Peter Corris' eighth historical novel, and his sixty-fifth work of fiction. It is set in 1886 aboard *The Colonial Queen*, a majestic Murray River paddle steamer, with a set of characters who have reached a watershed in their lives. Rosa Nightingale, a prostitute, seeks to break free of a life that is diminishing her and escape her opium addiction. Lucas Ramsay, a survivor of the Sudan War, has through a misadventure become a fugitive from the law, pursued by a police inspector, Griffith Summerhill. Sydney Stoneham, a bare-knuckle prize-fighter is facing the end of his career. And an alcoholic doctor, Alexander McPherson, interacts with the characters as they meet and deal with their attractions and hostilities. Running throughout the narrative is the Murray River, a violent force dictating the emotions and actions that shape the story. A compelling evocation of Australia's boom-time years, and of the gamblers and survivors inhabiting its shady side, *The Colonial Queen* comes highly recommended by Corris's fellow novelists. Responding to it as 'highly enjoyable', Thomas Keneally remarks that 'the high colour of the characters, who sometimes reminded me of characters in Joseph Furphy's *Such Is Life*, are like Furphy's not divorced from the society and politics of the time. And part of the politics is to do with water, just as is the case now.' John Dale finds it 'a well written, strongly realised narrative that will have a wide popular appeal.' He writes, 'Corris has successfully combined his considerable knowledge of the sport of boxing with his dramatic account of the nineteenth-century paddle steamers that serviced the third-longest navigable river in the world. The result is a cracking storyline with sharp dialogue and an original setting.'

*Australian Writers Network News*, 14 September 2011.

## Peter Corris, *That Empty Feeling*

I admit that I still feel guilty about reading so much crime fiction. But then I remind myself that I am not alone. P. G. Wodehouse, Evelyn Waugh, T. S. Eliot, Bertolt Brecht and W. H. Auden were similarly all addicts, if that's the word. And I suspect it might be.

And addicts need continuity of supply. A crucial feature of crime writing is regular production and delivery. Peter Corris is no exception. *That Empty Feeling* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2016) is the forty-first volume in the Cliff Hardy series. Corris is up there with the masters and mistresses, as satisfyingly prolific as Agatha Christie and Ruth Rendell, Robert B. Parker and Michael Connelly.

All the expected and satisfying generic components are here. There is the familiar Sydney setting of the inner city and the eastern suburbs, plus a trip down to the Illawarra, locations Corris has made his own. Cliff is hit over the head and knocked around, draws on his boxing skills for some vigorous reprisals and restores himself with a few stiff drinks. This is the archetypal private eye that we have come to expect and enjoy.

The female persons are no less classic. Desirable, enticing, yet ultimately unavailable on the one hand; or blatantly, indeed near nakedly available, and so inevitably and necessarily refused in that time-honoured fastidious, fearful withdrawal characteristic of Raymond Chandler's Marlowe and his disciples. And the formulae still work, triggering our mixed emotions of satisfaction and loss, that bittersweet note so effectively employed yet once more.

Boxing is one of Corris's enthusiasms and a history of boxing in Australia the subject of one of his non-fiction books. In this case Cliff is hired by Barry Bartlett, a one-time boxing promoter become property developer. Boxing and training camps provide one of the novel's plot lines. What is now called identity fraud provides another theme, a classic Anglo-Australian topic reaching back to the Tichborne case, but this time with the claimant making the reverse trip, from England to Australia. Is Ronnie Saunders, newly arrived from England, really Bartlett's son from a failed marriage? And then, beneath all the surface physical action, the car



driving, drinking and sexual encounters, fulfilled and otherwise, lies the deeper plot, the rationale for all the shenanigans. It involves international oil companies and fraud on a massive scale, not just the mysterious manipulations of the fluctuating price at the service stations. The details remain mercifully vague. This is not a novel in the Frederick Forsyth mode with every detail of invoicing, shipments, reshipment and so on minutely chronicled. And finally, for good measure and gender equality, there is someone who may be an arch villain, South African, titled and female.

Is Cliff showing signs of age? Can he still pack a punch and receive a few in return without too much pain? *That Empty Feeling* opens with Cliff leafing through the *Sydney Morning Herald* and wondering whether he likes its shift to a downsized tabloid format. 'I decided I didn't care one way or the other – the paper was mostly gossip and stories that didn't matter much now and wouldn't matter at all tomorrow.' Yes, he is getting older. Or one-time newspaper man Corris is getting older. But as for many of their age, Cliff's and Corris's, there are still some pleasures to be found in newspapers, like turning to the obituary pages and seeing the names of old acquaintances. It is the obituary of 'what the media called "a colourful Sydney identity"' that grabs Cliff's attention. And he recalls a case from the 1980s.

Immediately we are plunged back into a world before emails and the internet and mobile phones and CCTVs and the rest of the ubiquitous apparatus of the surveillance state. We are back in a world in which the PI had to do it all by legwork, even if the legs were much of the time on the accelerator and brake pedals of the iconic old Falcon, instead of beneath a desk in front of a computer. Private investigators now inhabit a different world from the days of Chandler and Hammett, as the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal revealed. Now it is all about data retrieval, following villains by listening to the messages on their mobile phones and looking at where they travelled on their opal card and what time their car was logged by a speed camera or the harbour bridge toll. *That Empty Feeling* takes its title from Cliff's sadness at the outcome of this past case. But for the reader, the satisfactions of the good old days of crime fiction remain unimpaired.

## Peter Corris, *Win, Lose or Draw*

*Win, Lose or Draw* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2017) is the forty-second novel in the Cliff Hardy series. It involves the disappearance of a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, the daughter of a wealthy multi-millionaire businessman. The businessman's wife is spaced out, off the planet; the son is disturbed, hostile and in deep trouble; the businessman may or may not be honest. Unstated possibilities of what might have happened to Juliana and to what degree it might or might not involve the family create a disturbing context, all the more powerful for being left implicit.

All the expected and satisfying generic components are here. There is the familiar Sydney setting of the prosperous eastern suburbs of the businessman, and Cliff's ungentrified corner of Glebe, locations Corris has made his own. But a possible sighting of the girl takes Cliff out of his usual territory to Norfolk Island. Has the girl been abducted for a ransom or has she simply run away? Is she part of a sex-trafficking operation or simply hooked up with a suspected drug smuggler? The possibilities hang in the air like, to quote Raymond Chandler, 'the honeyed reek of well-cured marijuana.' Episodes in Coolangatta and Byron Bay explore the world of yachties, druggies and drifters and soon bump up against organised crime and bent police. To tell more would be to tell too much, but true to form Cliff gets knocked around by bad guys, harassed by police and drinks too much.

*Win, Lose or Draw* is the final Cliff Hardy book. Since 1980, when he made his debut in *The Dying Trade*, Cliff's adventures have been providing an engaging commentary on contemporary Australian life, becoming increasingly popular as the series developed. Yet except for the film of *The Empty Beach* starring Bryan Brown, Cliff never made it on the big or little screen. One problem is that Cliff is a loner, the classic hard-drinking, one-time hard-smoking solitary. But for films and television the investigator needs a partner, someone to talk about the case to, in order to clarify it for the viewers and advance the action. Cliff's first-person monologue drives the novels perfectly, and it might have worked in a movie of the 1930s or 1940s, but most contemporary directors are frightened of depending on voice-over. So he remains firmly a print creation. Though also available in talking books and e-books.

Cliff ends up in pretty good shape in this last novel. He hasn't been given a heart attack like Morse or plunged over the Reichenbach Falls like Sherlock Holmes. He has aged, but only moderately. It is reassuring to think of him still out there in the mean streets and sundrenched posh suburbs, not getting as much work as he used to, taking it easy. The consistent production of these marvellous entertainments has earned Corris the title of 'the godfather of Australian crime fiction.' And though the novels have now come to an end, as 'The Godfather' Corris still continues to write his column of reflections on crime and other fiction in each issue of the online *Newtown Review of Books*. We wish him and Cliff well. We shall be thinking of them.

*Quadrant*, 61, 3, March 2017.

## Peter Corris, *See You at the Toxteth*

When Peter Corris wrote the first Cliff Hardy novels, Australian crime fiction was pretty well out of fashion. The 1970s had seen a vigorous re-emergence of a literary tradition, but genre fiction was low on local publishers' priorities. The success of the Cliff Hardy novels changed all that. But back in 1980 Corris initially had difficulty in finding a publisher.

*See You at the Toxteth* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2019) is a splendid retrospective for fans, and a marvellous introduction to Corris's writing for those unfamiliar with it. Sensibly, Jean Bedford has chosen to select a dozen short stories rather than include excerpts from the novels. Excerpts are too often frustrating and inconclusive. But the stories represented here are all self-contained. They do, however, feature some of the recurrent characters from the novels.

One of the strengths of crime fiction is that it allows an investigation of social and political issues. Through the latter part of the last century, and indeed beyond, literary fiction was becoming increasingly etiolated. The realist tradition surrendered to postmodern games, self-referentialism and fantasy as writers avoided contentious or problematic political themes in order to attract Literature Board funding and win prizes. Crime fiction was not generally taken seriously by funding bodies or prize-giving committees, and this liberated its writers to deal with corrupt police, politicians, and businessmen, as well as with low-life standover men, junkies and informers. And to see them as all of a piece. 'I took the money, I didn't have any qualms about the way it was earned,' Cliff Hardy says in one story, 'hell, I'd worked for doctors and lawyers, all manner of professional people.' And on another occasion he observes, 'We're associating with criminals all the time – motor mechanics, doctors, real-estate agents.' This was the tradition of Raymond Chandler, and Corris took to it wholeheartedly.

It is not all corruption, however. Born and educated in Victoria, Corris spent most of his life in Sydney and Sydney is where most of the Cliff Hardy books are set. They sing a song of praise for Sydney, the sun, the beaches, the prosperous suburbs, the dives of the inner city. The richness and diversity of the city, whether at work or

play, are celebrated here. Greyhounds, boxing, tennis, and golf all feature in these stories, along with brothels and brothel owners, police on the take and the genre's necessarily problematic female persons.

Perhaps even more than the novels, the stories are classically formulaic. Or, to put it another way, old-fashioned. And that is part of their appeal. The formulae are the formulae of the old pulps – concussive blows to the head, some deft footwork and well-aimed punches, and the inevitable blaze of gun fire. They do not have the wanton, excessive body count of Dashiell Hammett. But Cliff Hardy had been a soldier in Malaya and is as much the man of action as an analytic investigator. He belongs to a world before the roll out of data-recording surveillance devices. As Corris observed, the development of email, mobile phones and the internet 'has had a profound effect on the plotting and texture of crime fiction.' But, he adds, 'typically, characters like Harry Bosch and Jack Reacher have only a nodding acquaintance with the technology. Their talents lie elsewhere.' And so do Cliff Hardy's. Though Peter Corris himself was comfortable with digital technology and delighted that most of his fiction has been made available in e-books. When his eyesight failed in his seventies, e-books allowed him to continue enjoying fiction and biography with their facility to enlarge type. And his last novel, *Jean Bedford* tells us in her introduction, he wrote in a 36-point font.

To read the Cliff Hardy novels and stories is to enter a past world, as past as the world of Maigret or Sherlock Holmes. This is not a negative criticism. The world Corris created had a coherence, it was grounded in reality, in recognisable settings. It captured an era of Sydney now lost. Even some of the physical settings have vanished. The Toxteth hotel still stands but the nearby Harold Park racetrack of the 1985 story 'The Arms of the Law' exists no longer, submerged beneath apartment blocks.

The bulk of the book consists of stories, but the last third represents Corris's reflections on crime-writing – on his own practice and on his extensive reading in the genre. These reflections are assembled in part from his 'Godfather' column in the on-line *Newtown Review of Books*. But they also include a hitherto unpublished, sustained, though not too serious, study of the topic, *An ABC of Crime Writing*. Corris fans, and there are many worldwide, will be fascinated by these pieces, with their insights into his mind, his creative processes, and his humane values. His enthusiasms are wide-ranging and the *ABC* offers an extensive range of suggestions

for further reading. He was generous in his recommendations. He could also be incisively critical. He notes how the action ‘slowed to a halt’ in P. D. James’s novels ‘when she padded them out with descriptions of furniture and architecture.’

The columns and *ABC* entries provide some invaluable observations for both readers and writers. ‘I believe that the best and possibly the only way to write crime stories is to read a great many of them,’ he comments. ‘This is certainly what I did. From an early age I read a variety of crime novels, from the pulp of Carter Brown to the polish of Nicholas Blake, from the clue-puzzle cosiness of Agatha Christie to the grime and danger of Dashiell Hammett.’ And to them he went on to add forty-two Cliff Hardy books, eight Box Office Browning adventures, three Luke Dunlops, and another ten historical and contemporary novels, as well as biographies and anthologies. It was an amazing achievement.

*Quadrant*, 63, 10, October 2019.

# Notes

## Adam Lindsay Gordon

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- 13 Collected in Gordon, *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*, A. H. Massina, Melbourne, 1870.
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- 15 ‘A Song of Autumn’, *Australasian*, 4 June 1870, collected in *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes*.
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## Adam Lindsay Gordon and Father Julian Tenison Woods

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## Henry Kendall’s Recovery at Brisbane Water

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- 43 See Ian McLaren, *Henry Kendall: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, item 665; Michael Ackland, 'No Easy Age for Faith or Verse: *Songs From the Mountains* and Henry Kendall's Burden of Election', in McDougall, 403 n. 19.
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- 45 See Fenton, ed., 18–30.
- 46 Frederick Kendall, *Later Years*; Fenton, ed., 60, citing Marjorie Kendall, *Kissing Cousins*, Milton, 1988.
- 47 Wilding, *Wild Bleak Bohemia*, 502. The surviving correspondence between the Fagans and Kendall dates from when Kendall was at Camden Haven; Ackland quotes and discusses it, *Henry Kendall: The Man and the Myths*, 196–9. See also Clifford Tolchard, 'Henry Kendall at Gosford', *Walkabout*, October 1963, 20–2.
- 48 Ackland, *Henry Kendall: The Man and the Myths*, 309 n. 13. Photograph of inscription in Joan Fenton, 73.

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- 51 Peter Fagan was a member of the committee that established the Kendall memorial in Waverley cemetery, along with, amongst others, Philip Holdsworth and Thomas Butler, editor of *Freeman's Journal*; see McLaren, 226.
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- 53 This is an expanded version of a talk at the 'Names Upon a Stone' exhibition at the Henry Kendall Cottage and Historical Museum, curated by Kreenah Yelds for the National Trust 2017 Australian Heritage Festival and the Brisbane Water Historical Society.

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- 10 Michael Ackland, *Henry Kendall: The Man and the Myths*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, 209–12.
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  - 16 Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*, American Publishing Co, Hartford, Connecticut, 1897. A fuller text published in England as *More Tramps Abroad*, London, 1897.

## Henry Lawson – Ethnic Writer

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## *Henry Lawson: a Stranger on the Darling*

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- 16 Kenway, *Prelude to Power*, 117.
- 17 Kenway, 118.

- 18 Clement Semmler, 'Some Notes on the Literature of the Shearers' Strikes of 1891 and 1894', *Australian Quarterly*, 11, 1, December 1969, 81.
- 19 Gavin Souter, *A Peculiar People: The Australians in Paraguay*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1968, 12–13, 122.
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- 124 George Reeve, 'New Australia, Cosme and Wm Lane', *Ross's*, 16 August 1919, 5.
- 125 Mary Gilmore, 'Colonia Cosme and New Australia', *Ross's*, 11 October 1919, 4. Reeve replied to Mary Gilmore in *Ross's*, 15 November 1919, 14.
- 126 William Wood, 'The Workingman's Paradise', *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, undated clipping, New Australia papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
- 127 *New Australia*, 1, 15, 27 February 1894, 1; 1, 16, 24 March 1894, 2. *The Worker* (Brisbane) 2, 25, 30 May 1891, 2 carried an article on 'Private Capitalistic Police' detailing the use of Pinkerton detectives as undercover agents in anti-worker activities in the USA, commenting 'the Griffith Government stands idly by and sees such a "damnable institution" established under its nose here in Queensland.'
- 128 *Cosme Monthly*, September 1896, 4.
- 129 *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*.
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- 131 *Cosme Monthly*, June 1904, 1.
- 132 *Cosme Monthly*, June 1899.
- 133 John Sibbald, *A Short History of New Australia*, reprinted from *South Australian Register*, W. K. Thomas printer, Adelaide, n.d., 1.
- 134 Julian Ashton, *Now Came Still Evening On*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1941, 126. Ashton's chapter on Lane includes an account of New Australia and Cosme by Mary Gilmore.
- 135 Harry Taylor, letter on the occasion of the death of Rose Scott, *The Register*, reprinted in *The Murray Pioneer*, undated clipping in A. G. Stephens' newspaper cutting book, 'New Australia', 128, Mitchell Library, Sydney. On Taylor, see Don Gobbett and Malcolm Saunders, *With Lane in Paraguay: Harry Taylor of 'The Murray Pioneer' 1873-1932*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 1995.
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- 141 Colin Roderick, ed., *Henry Lawson: Collected Verse*, Vol. I, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1967, 152, 438. Ann-Mari Jordens, 'Fred J. Broomfield', *Australian Literary Studies*, 9, October 1980, 468.
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- 145 J. T. Lang, 'Australia's Experiment in Communism – Upheaval in Utopia', *Truth*, 7 November 1954, 36.
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- 147 Roderick, ed., *Henry Lawson: Collected Verse*, Vol. 3, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1969, 94.
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- 154 Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, 89; Souter, *A Peculiar People*, 30.
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### William Lane and *The Worker* Book Fund: 'Progressive Books at Cost'

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### Anne Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaïd: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay*

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- 3 Gavin Souter, *A Peculiar People: The Australians in Paraguay*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1968. See also Don Gobbett and Malcolm Saunders, *With Lane in Paraguay: Harry Taylor of 'The Murray Pioneer' 1873–1932*, Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, 1995.

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## Jack Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells*

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- 4 There is a biography, *Inky Stephensen: Wild Man of Letters* by Craig Munro, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992.
- 5 On Lindsay's fiction, see Alick West, *The Mountain in the Sunlight* (1958), Westport, Connecticut, 1980; Manfred Hecker, 'Besonderheiten des sozialistischen Realismus us in Jack Lindsay's Romanen zur englischen Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 21 (1973); H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s', in John Lucas, ed., *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, Hassocks, Sussex, 1978; David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, London, 1978; Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days; British Fiction in the 1930s*, London, 1990; Michael Wilding, 'Jack Lindsay's 1649: A Novel of a Year', in Bernard Smith, ed., *Culture and History (essays presented to Jack Lindsay)*, Sydney, 1984, reprinted in Michael Wilding, *Studies in Classic Australian Fiction*, Sydney & Nottingham, 1997.

## Christina Stead

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- 3 Shirley Cass, Ros Cheney, David Malouf and Michael Wilding, ed., *We Took Their Orders and Are Dead*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1971.

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- 2 Judah Waten, *Alien Son*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1952. First published in *Meanjin*, 9 (1950).
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- 17 Kris Hemensley, *Games: An Exhibition 1970–72*, Rigmarole of the Hours, Melbourne, 1978.
- 18 Helen Garner, *Postcards from Surfers*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1985.
- 19 Ania Walwicz, *Writing*, Rigmarole, Melbourne, 1982.
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## Australian Magazines Surviving the Nineteenth Century

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- 2 Alexander Sutherland, ed., *Victoria and its Metropolis: Past and Present*, McCarron, Bird & Company, 2 vols, Melbourne, 1888.
- 3 'A Master Printer. Fifty Years in Business. Mr A. H. Massina', *Herald* (Melbourne), 2 March 1909, 6.



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- 5 Norman Lindsay, *Bohemians of the Bulletin*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965.
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## The New Australian Writing of the 1960s and 1970s

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- 2 See Michael Wilding, 'Adventurous Spirits', in Craig Munro, ed., *The Writer's Press – UQP's First Fifty Years*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1998, 43–59, reprinted in Wilding, *Growing Wild*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2016, 267–77.
- 3 Discussion between Professor Leonie Kramer, Les A. Murray and Michael Wilding chaired by Jan Garrett on ABC Radio 2, Sunday 29 May 1977. I suggested to Laurie Hergenhan that he publish a transcript of the discussion in *Australian Literary Studies*. He agreed, but Les refused permission.

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